



DATE: 7/28/2020

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: René G. Santiago, Deputy County Executive/Director, County of Santa Clara Health System DocuSigned by: René G. Santiago
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SUBJECT: BHSD Town Hall Meetings and Consumer Services Post Shelter-in-Place

Under advisement from the Board of Supervisors’ Health and Hospital Committee meeting on June 24, 2020. Supervisor Ellenberg requested the Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD) to provide an off-agenda report related to BHSD Town Hall meetings and consideration of consumer feedback to inform services post shelter-in-place.

Town Hall Meeting Activities

From April 12, 2020 to June 1, 2020 BHSD’s Suicide Prevention (SP) Team conducted a series of virtual town halls, titled “COVID-19 and Your Mental Health,” for cultural communities across the County. Ten virtual town halls were conducted with at least 450 individuals participating live. The event recordings received nearly 2,200 views on BHSD’s Facebook after the live events. The town halls gathered participant questions in advance and generally included one to two mental health experts, along with peers with lived experience, who shared tips, information, and resources for coping with stress during the pandemic and shelter-in-place order. The town halls ranged from one to two hours long and included time for open dialogue and discussion with participants.

The cultural communities served and the dates of the respective town halls were as follows: Nepalese (4/12), Chinese parents (5/11), middle and high school-aged youth (5/19), Indian/Punjabi-speaking (5/21), Hispanic/Latinx (5/27), Vietnamese (5/27), Korean (5/27), South Asian (5/28), Indian/Hindi-speaking (5/29), and LGBTQ+ (6/1).

The top question topics posed by the town hall participants were on general mental health (25% of the questions); COVID-19 (18%); coping (16%); and resources (13%). Other question topics included youth needs (8%); medical care (4%); connectedness (4%); family concerns (3%); intersectionality (3% - LGBTQ+ town hall only). General mental health questions pertained to anxiety, depression, and caring for one’s own mental health as well as others’. Concerns about contracting COVID-19 were most common during mid- to end-May 2020 town halls. The Hispanic/Latinx town hall generated the largest percentage of questions (63%) about COVID-19.

The virtual format and cultural outreach of the town halls attracted engagement of those not typically reached by traditional County programs and opportunities to engage with the public. First, relatively higher participation was seen among cultural communities that did not fall into the communities represented by the County's five threshold languages. This finding indicates the need for the County to acknowledge and provide culturally appropriate services for the many other racial/ethnic cultures that do not represent the majority numbers of languages spoken. Second, the format of the town halls attracted people who did not typically engage in mental health services or resources. The town hall format, along with the opportunity to have an open two-way dialogue, provided a more inviting format for the public to be heard, as compared to a therapy support group or an official Board meeting or press conference. With the virtual format participants could also remain anonymous and with their cameras turned off.

School Mental Health Town Hall Meetings

On May 7, 2020, BHSD began virtual COVID-19 Mental Health Town Hall meetings for students and parents and the first meeting took place at Christopher High School within Gilroy Unified School District to support their health and well-being covering topics such as managing stress, anxiety and depression. Resources were discussed and BHSD offered a panel of professionals to answer questions. Because of the positive feedback provided at the town hall, another town hall with the same format was held for Mt. Madonna School on June 4, 2020. Both town halls were recorded, and links were made available. Due to the summer school break, the next town hall is scheduled for Mountain View Whisman School District in early August 2020.

Client Feedback to Inform Services Post Shelter-in-Place

The BHSD's SP Team will continue to use the town hall format and provide support to other County teams and agencies that would like to apply the format to engage communities and individuals who would otherwise not typically engage with County programming. The town hall format allows for organizations to engage with the community and flexibly respond to current events. For example, after these first ten town halls, the SP Program has supported NAMI Santa Clara County in organizing at least three more town halls for the African-American and African descent communities, addressing the issues of systemic racism, racial equity, and mental health.

Additional Feedback to Inform Services during SIP from the School Linked Services Town Hall Meetings

Based on feedback gathered through School Linked Services Town Hall meetings and the BHSD workgroup, BHSD continues to provide services through telehealth. Through the use of technology it has helped children and their families to transition from face-to-face services to telehealth. BHSD has found that consumers have been receptive to telehealth during SIP for its flexibility. As an example, some consumers have preferred shorter therapy sessions but more frequent check-ins throughout the week, which the telehealth model has been able to easily accommodate.

However, BHSD has found that access to technology has been a high need for some of our consumers, particularly for youth participating in distance learning. Hence, depending on the critical need of the consumer, home visits and/or in-person clinic appointments are provided. Also, providers have found creative ways to engage youth and families through group therapy and creating and delivering care packages to families. In regard to outreach, communication in all forms are utilized, e.g., news media, email, distribution of flyers, texting, automated calls to help inform consumers of important information and resources.

BHSD's Shelter-in-Place and Transitions Workgroup

On May 6, 2020, a BHSD management workgroup was formed with the goal of providing post shelter-in-place (SIP) transition procedures and support for employees, as well as direction for consumer care. A series of focus groups inclusive of management and line staff were held on May 20, 21, 27 and 28, 2020. This process enabled the workgroup to gather opinions and recommendations for safety, consumer care and telehealth. The focus groups indicated the need to survey consumers regarding their experience with telehealth and telephone services during SIP.

Also, the workgroup developed an online consumer survey, to be administered in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, with 13 questions covering three areas: technical issues, client-therapist relationships and access to services while using telehealth and telephone services. Technical questions covered the consumer's audio/video equipment, internet access/disruptions and comfort using telephone and telehealth software. Access and relationship questions explored the consumer's sense of privacy, ease of access, respect and cultural sensitivity while using these services.

The survey will be administered to consumers over telephone and in-person as well for consumers who need a clinic in-person appointment. The administration of the survey will commence during the week of July 27, 2020 and results will be tabulated the following week. This information will be utilized to inform consumer services during SIP and post SIP.

cc: Miguel Marquez, Chief Operating Officer
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