

MHSA Guiding Principles
Adopted by the CSAC MHSA Working Group
January 29, 2020

Introduction

The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), or Proposition 63 of 2004, provides critical resources and support to improve the county behavioral health infrastructure in California. Since its passage, California's county-administered specialty mental health plans have implemented a range of community-based programs and services to serve all Californians at risk of or living with behavioral health issues.

Despite recent progress, counties and the MHSA remain under intense pressure. County behavioral health services are working hard to address new challenges, including homelessness, the opioid and methamphetamine epidemics, coordination with the justice system, and the rising rate of death by suicide among the state's youth. Governor Newsom and other leaders are calling for more assistance on these pressing issues, and trusted local stakeholders, behavioral health consumers, and families stand ready to help.

To that end, counties believe that California can continue to lead the nation and the world in behavioral health investments by protecting MHSA funding, instituting targeted spending options, and creating collaborative and robust measurement of outcomes. These three principles, developed with input from county supervisors, county executives, and county behavioral health directors, represent the foundation for the next chapter of county innovation with MHSA funding to better meet the current behavioral health needs of all Californians.

Key Principles

- Funding Protections – County MHSA funding is an essential pillar of our county behavioral health systems. Preserving this crucial resource is a top priority for California's counties. MHSA revenue allows counties to serve all ages, invest in prevention, and develop innovative interventions. MHSA funding also supports Medi-Cal specialty mental health services and helps bring in more than a billion dollars of federal financial participation for behavioral health services annually. For these reasons, counties oppose any change in MHSA funding for counties, since redirections, bifurcations, cost shifts and the like – either directly or indirectly – would negatively impact all behavioral health programs and the people counties currently serve.

- Flexibility – Create specific flexibility for MHSA funding to allow local stakeholder committees to prioritize and counties to serve those living with substance use disorders. This will help counties meet the unique needs of their residents and end the bureaucratic hurdles associated with providing services to people with co-occurring disorders and complex needs. Counties and local stakeholders are also clamoring for flexibility between the Act's funding silos, including Community Services and Supports, Innovation, and Prevention and Early Intervention. It is important to retain the Act's emphasis on these

critical priorities while also allowing local stakeholders, in conjunction with counties, to direct funding to the most urgent needs of their communities. Allowing MHSA funding to be expended on Substance Use Disorder services and softening the funding silos – while retaining critical local stakeholder and consumer input and direction – will help counties invest in prevention, intervention, innovation, and services that better meet the needs of their communities.

- Transparency and Accountability – Counties and county behavioral health departments strongly endorse transparency and accountability in all services and activities funded with public funds. To that end, counties support the collaborative development of measurable, data-driven outcomes for MHSA funding. We must also align public and stakeholder expectations with MHSA funding and expenditures by building on current MHSA reporting requirements to create comprehensive, timely, and transparent data without duplicating or creating burdensome workloads. Counties welcome the voices of consumers, stakeholders, organizations, executive and legislative leaders, academics and data scientists to ensure access to important data and robust outcomes for all MHSA activities.

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