

Good afternoon Members of the MHSOAC,

I am writing to provide brief written public comment to the MHSOAC regarding the COVID-19 recommendations to the Governor and the California Legislature. I was on the call and tried to get into the speaker queue several times but was dropped from the line and my name was never called. Here are my comments, please add them to the official record.

The draft letter references “emerging threats,” however, one of California’s most deadly COVID-19 emerging threats is barely mentioned in the draft letter. As the early data is clearly illustrating, the threat to California’s People of Color and LGBTQ+ communities is urgent and deadly.

To truly address the needs of all of California’s most vulnerable populations, the draft letter must include a specific recommendation to prioritize addressing the mental health disparities in our marginalized racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ communities.

In the COVID-19 context, the educational, economic, and health disparities historically experienced by People of Color and the LGBTQ+ communities are exponentially exacerbated as evidenced by the disproportionate rates of black and brown people unemployed, homeless, hospitalized, and dying.

I strongly urge that the MHSOAC recommend that Governor Newsom and the Legislature leverage the infrastructure of the California Reducing Disparities Project funded through the Office of Health Equity within the California Public Health Department. The CRDP infrastructure is comprised of 35 culturally responsive and tested Community Based Organizations serving the African American, Latino/x, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Native American, and LGBTQ+ communities across the state. Resources that leverage this infrastructure would immediately result in increased capacity to address the COVID-19 crisis and mitigate the mental health disparities among our families, consumers, and communities during this time of pandemic crisis.

If not now, then when...

In community,

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Dear Commissioners;

I thought that I was in the line to be called at Public Comment on Action 3, but I never got called.

My public comments follow:

1. The racial and ethnic disparities that already exist in our society have been magnified by the COVID 19. Diverting funds from PEI would reduce support from the very agencies and people whom they serve who are so disproportionately affected by the coronavirus.
2. We cannot undermine MHSA's basic principles in the name of fighting the coronavirus, especially stakeholder involvement in decision making.
3. The digital divide is real and also magnified by the stay at home orders. People in the public mental health system disproportionately do not have virtual access. Either they don't have computers or internet service, or their phones have restrictive service plans. The MHSOAC letter to the Governor should express this concern, and ask for remedies. The remedies are easy - buy computers, negotiate with services providers for free service (or counties pay for the service), etc. NAMI California has suggested technology prescriptions, just like med prescriptions.
4. Peer support services are especially relevant at this time and should be promoted.. Social connectivity, during this time of isolation, is so important, and the essence of peer support. Also, peers, by their definition, have experienced crises and gotten to the other side. They know about recovery and resiliency. They can assist others with the process, as well as sharing recovery and resiliency tools with others.

Thank you for taking time to read this.

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