



**Mental Health Services  
Oversight & Accountability Commission**

**Subcommittee on Innovation Teleconference Meeting Summary**

**Date: Thursday, October 29, 2020 | Time: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**MHSOAC  
1325 J Street, Suite 1700  
Sacramento, CA 95814**

**\*\*FINAL\*\***

Committee Members:	Staff:	Other Attendees:
John Boyd, Chair Itai Danovitch, Vice Chair	Toby Ewing Sharmil Shah	Joel Baum Dave Cortright Kyle Doran Elissa Feld Jean Harris Stacie Hiramoto Steve Leoni Steve McNally Carolina Valle Karen Vicari Poshi Walker

**Welcome and Introductions**

Commissioner John Boyd, Committee Chair, called the teleconference meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone. He reviewed the meeting protocols.

**Agenda Item 1: Status of County Innovation Funding and Pending Innovation Proposals**

Chair Boyd stated the Committee will hear a report on available Innovation funds, the queue of pending county Innovation proposals, and the potential for Innovation funds to revert to the state at the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year. He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Executive Director Ewing provided an update on county Innovation funding. He stated concerns have been raised about how to ensure that the intent of the Innovation components of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) is being realized, how to take successful Innovations and go to scale, and how counties can learn from each other's

experiences. He stated cross-county investments have allowed counties to pool funding and share learning, which better positions them to move toward scalability.

Executive Director Ewing summarized the staff memo, which was included in the meeting packet. He stated the need to better understand the investment opportunities on the funding side and on the programmatic side to ensure that the Innovation component is as effective as it can be in supporting county mental health systems. He stated tremendous workload pressure will be faced in the first and second quarters of the coming year unless strategies are created to streamline the process for staff and counties, such as recognizing shared opportunities and supporting the ability of counties to coinvest in key priorities.

Sharmil Shah, Ph.D., Chief of Program Operations, stated emails have been sent to the 29 counties that staff calculated would experience reversion issues. Six counties have responded that they have worked with the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) and indicated that they do not have funds that are subject to reversion. Staff is working closely with the DHCS and the counties to get more accurate data.

Dr. Shah stated ten Innovation projects are currently in the queue, the majority of which had been tabled last year in order to prioritize last year's counties with reversion issues. Several of the 29 counties have not formally come to the Commission but have Innovation plans in their Three-Year Plans and are currently in the stakeholder process. She urged the Committee to consider ways to streamline the approval process while at the same time continuing to support the counties and the Commission.

### Discussion

Chair Boyd agreed that this is an ongoing issue that has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. He asked what staff would propose to the Committee that could signal the need for strong change in this area both currently and in the future.

Executive Director Ewing stated the need to avoid the cycle of scrambling to spend funding that is subject to the reversion deadline at the end of the fiscal year. He asked if it would be helpful for staff to engage in forecasting to create greater public awareness about funding that is available for Innovation. He stated often the pressure to spend occurs because of the reversion deadline rather than prior to it. He asked how to incentivize counties to spend Innovation funding well before the reversion deadline and how to support improved transparency and robust community conversations at the county and Commission level.

Executive Director Ewing stated counties still need to go through the public planning process but perhaps that could be streamlined by helping counties recognize areas of shared investment and framing out what those opportunities could look like to shape the conversation at the community level, such as discussing how to improve the cost-effectiveness of programs to serve more individuals with the available funding.

Vice Chair Danovitch stated he liked framing it as tactical problems that need to be solved in terms of the reversion deadline and bottlenecks, which compromises quality, and the strategic questions about how to focus efforts and ensure that this powerful mechanism is being used in the best way possible. He asked stakeholders to provide feedback and practical suggestions to solve these issues.

Chair Boyd asked staff for bold recommendations about how to provide the type of functional change in leadership at the state and county levels to move through the issue. Unmet needs have been discussed for many years that Innovation can help solve. Counties and communities are working in silos when they can be brought together. Agreement on focus priority areas would move the field in a much broader way. He asked staff to make suggestions on the processes and bottlenecks that have been raised not only this year but every year he has been on the Commission.

### Public Comment

Joel Baum, Senior Director for Professional Development, Gender Spectrum, stated concerns about rushed proposals, collaboration, and effective public engagement. The work being done by the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP) exemplifies everything mentioned today, and is work that the Commission has already funded that now deserves the opportunity to be enlarged and brought to a scale to have even greater impacts. The 35 CRDP partners provide amazing examples of organizations doing deep and profound work, which is the very definition of innovative. These projects are working in a cross-discipline way and providing powerful examples of what authentic dialogue on difficult issues looks like. These are not rushed projects but are innovative projects that were deeply thought out with clear theories of change, grounded in communications with communities and informed by stakeholders, with results that lead to significant changes in the lives of clients.

Poshi Walker, LGBTQ Program Director, Cal Voices, and Co-Director, #Out4MentalHealth, echoed the comments of the previous speaker. The speaker stated concern that co-investing, which is being recommended in case something is successful, will also mean massive failure, since Innovations are also meant to be able to fail. The Technology Suite Collaborative Innovation Project is an example of counties jumping onboard, often without true community engagement and buy-in. Millions of dollars have been spent on apps that still do not exist. The speaker stated they hear the concern about reversion, workload, and a more streamlined approval process but asked how co-investing and defining priorities for counties allows for the community planning process and community-driven projects. The needs of the most unserved, underserved, and inappropriately served populations truly need to be addressed. That is what the Innovation funding was supposed to be for.

Poshi Walker recommended that the Committee listen to Joel Baum's comments. 35 community defined practices would solve the issue of the 30 counties that need Innovative projects and would go a long way to increasing culturally sensitive and competent services to the most vulnerable and underserved groups. The speaker suggested holding more frequent meetings since going virtual has shortened the meeting time, and using the Committees as a vetting opportunity and a way to offer recommendations to Innovation proposals prior to coming before the Commission.

Steve Leoni, consumer and advocate, suggested asking the Legislature for a one-year extension on this year's reversion deadline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He suggested offering technical assistance to counties early on in the process every year to help them understand what it would look like for their projects if they run up against the reversion deadline and that, although funding will be taken away, they will also get funding back. It gives counties flexibility and a sense of what the new deadline will be, which might

stimulate counties to think more about what they want and need to do rather than scrambling to do something just because of this year's deadline.

Elissa Feld, Senior Policy Analyst, County Behavioral Health Directors Association (CBHDA), stated counties are in favor of finding a way to streamline the Innovation process. Many counties have projects in the queue and are thankful to staff for their help. She suggested involving Commissioners from the beginning so issues can come to light and be dealt with earlier in the process.

Dave Cortright, citizen, product designer and project manager, stated they joined the meeting today because they wanted to move into mental health and wellbeing and are now certified as a crisis counselor. The speaker stated the problems outlined sound like a project management issue. They suggested a public dashboard or project dashboard listing all the counties and projects being funded, the amount of funding assigned to each county, and trends over time of how those funds are being spent. If that is open and public for everyone to see as a single source of data, there would be no surprises such as deadlines that do not seem to be on the radar until the last quarter of the year. The speaker suggested, along with that single source of data, possibly sending out status emails so counties can check their funding and deadlines at any point throughout the year. The speaker suggested talking about timelines and deadlines more often than just in the last quarter of the year. Having a dashboard as a resource would be helpful.

Stacie Hiramoto, Director, Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition (REMHDCO), strongly supported the testimony of Joel Baum, one of the CRDP partners. The speaker encouraged more emphasis and collaboration around using Innovation funds more for reducing disparities, particularly in racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ communities.

Steve McNally, citizen and family member, suggested implementing the reversion and informing counties of what would be lost. If reversion is never done, counties will never see the need to take care of it. Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange County have a tremendous opportunity to do something together. The speaker cautioned against legislation so counties do not lose something they could have done without the legislation. The speaker suggested thinking of ways to extend programs and leverage funds, that Commissioners adopt their local areas and strengthen their relationships with communities in those areas, and that counties figure out how to bill private insurance for services offered, such as crisis assessment teams, as a way to extend budgets.

Jean Harris, NAMI, CFLC member, suggested increasing community engagement during the Innovation process and posting a list of Committee members on the website, specifically the Evaluation Committee. The staff memo stated more community voices need to be heard in the process of evaluating the Innovation proposals. In the summary from July's meeting, public comment suggested including more community members on the Committee and Commissioners agreed. The speaker asked how this suggestion will be moved forward. Streamlining the process, increasing the number of Committee meetings, and having access to documents on the website with results of Innovation projects and counties that were funded and in the queue are important for increased effectiveness.

Karen Vicari, Director of Policy, Cal Voices, stated it is important to get back to the original statute. The Commission needs to prioritize the Innovation plans that are coming through

as part of the mandate for oversight and accountability. Providing technical assistance to counties will require more meetings or more meaningful Committees to help with this work. If the Commission has time to do technical assistance, the speaker suggested doing model community planning processes or Innovation plans around that to build a foundation to make things easier for the counties going forward. The speaker suggested an Innovation that focuses on the digital divide to lay a foundation to ensure that communities have access to devices and the Internet to enable them to virtually participate in the community planning process, which ultimately will make Innovations easier for counties.

Carolina Valle, Senior Policy Manager, California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN), echoed Joel Baum and Stacie Hiramoto's comments about the importance of prioritizing community defined evidence-based practices. CPEHN supports evidence-based practices and the modification of evidence-based practices for particular populations. The speaker stated the need to continue to study, evaluate, and integrate community defined practices. Community Defined Evidence Projects (CDEPs) align nicely with the goals of introducing mental health practices, making changes to existing mental health practices, or applying community defined practices. The staff memo states, while the ongoing review found more than half of the proposals are reducing disparities, it is not yet clear whether they are used to support community defined practices. This is a key moment to think about how to create more sustainability and higher quality services. Strong outcomes are being seen in existing CDEPs. Investments need to continue to ensure that underserved populations are getting services that make the most sense for them.

Vice Chair Danovitch stated the importance of supporting the development of effective plans generated through meaningful input from the community and including effective evaluations that can be learned from. A plan could purport to do many things but, if the plan is not evaluated, there is no way to know if it did anything worthwhile.

## **Agenda Item 2: Update on the Innovation Systems Change Project**

Vice Chair Danovitch stated the Committee will hear a progress report on the Innovation Systems Change Project and discuss a draft list of barriers to Innovation that have been preliminarily identified. He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Dr. Shah stated the Innovation Systems Change Project has contracted with Social Finance to find better ways to support counties in Innovation and continuous improvement. The project will allow the Commission to identify and pursue a variety of strategic opportunities to better inform the development, implementation, and assessment of county Innovation plans. The project's goals will be accomplished in three phases. The first phase was to identify barriers and highlight successful strategies. Dr. Shah invited Kyle Doran to present and discuss a draft list of barriers to Innovation that have been preliminarily identified through comprehensive interviews with over 50 individuals.

Kyle Doran, Director, Social Finance, provided a project overview, with a slide presentation, of the Phase 1 methodology, emerging themes, and the barriers and recommendations.

### **Public Comment**

Steve Leoni suggested opening participation up at least to the middle of January to do this well. The speaker stated they will send their full comment to the Committee.

Stacie Hiramoto stated the analysis chart clearly lays out the issues and is easy to read. The speaker stated concern about the highly disproportionate lack of people from racial and ethnic communities particularly proportionate to their numbers in the counties.

Dave Cortright stated the level of ability to reflect on what is working and what is not is great to see. One thing that stood out was what success looks like. The speaker suggested including case studies of successful Innovation projects that have gone through the pipeline with what made them good, what each side did, and which stage in the process will set the stage for what future Innovations could look like. The speaker stated making a hierarchy like that and making it public would solve some of the other issues by showing how other counties got around issues or how they made things work.

Elissa Feld stated many counties had not heard that this was happening and wanted to give their feedback and identify ways that they can make this process easier for their community members. One barrier that is highlighted well in the report is the tension between the Innovation approval process and the plan details. Counties work hard and spend a lot of time to go through all the steps and there can be frustration when it comes to the approval process with the Commission. Counties suggested having Commissioner feedback earlier on in the process to give counties the opportunity to make adjustments prior to presenting projects to the Commission.

Vice Chair Danovitch asked about the feasibility of adding a metric to the dashboard that reflects imminent reversion funds at the county level.

Executive Director Ewing stated it is already there but is on a plan-by-plan basis. Staff will discuss the possibility of forecasting.

Vice Chair Danovitch stated the need to evaluate how things are done for every new significant undertaking, such as how to evaluate the improvements made to the Innovation process.

## **Wrap-Up and Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 p.m.