

MHSOAC STRATEGIC PLAN (2024-2027) | PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Accelerating Transformational Change

California's future as a prosperous, compassionate and healthy state is increasingly linked with the behavioral health and wellbeing of all of its residents.

This reality motivated the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission when it advocated for and launched the Mental Health Student Services Act, worked with pioneering counties to elevate early psychosis intervention, and promoted universal access to youth drop-in centers.

Similarly, the Commission worked with communities to improve Full Service Partnerships, improve crisis response and produce a state suicide prevention plan – to strengthen strategies for reducing incarceration, hospitalization and homelessness.

Through these initiatives, the Commission also has learned how it can help community partners better implement proven strategies and innovate new ones with the ultimate goal of reducing disparities in access to culturally competent services and promoting recovery and wellbeing.

In this strategic plan, the Commission is committing to sharply focus its efforts to accelerate the development of effective community-based behavioral health systems that provide early, integrated and tailored services available to everyone.

A Point of Inflection

The behavioral health service system in California is at a threshold, defined by growing public needs, awareness and empathy; by powerful new knowledge and promising practices; and, by the imperative to better serve those with serious and chronic conditions while striving to prevent and intervene early to preserve and nurture health and wellbeing.

Californians are experiencing a mental health and substance abuse epidemic, made increasingly acute by a global pandemic, a strained workforce, and diminished social safety nets for communities that need them most.

The Governor and Legislature have recognized this imperative in launching initiatives such as the Children and Youth Behavioral Initiative and in developing revisions to the Mental Health Services Act that will go before voters for their approval in March 2024.

There has never been more funding and momentum to drive transformational change, or such significant opportunities to advance new innovations in behavioral health treatment and delivery models, but more work is required to reach the visionary system that the MHSA intended to achieve.

To develop this Strategic Plan, the Commission consulted with community voices and its partners, reflected on the progress that has been made and identified the right next steps for advancing transformational change.

The priorities and goals defined in this plan build upon the Commission's

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charge, its demonstrated capacity to drive improvements, and its stewardship of the MHSOAC's core values of person-centered and culturally competent care; of prevention, early intervention and innovation, and of collaboration across agencies and communities to reduce inequities and disparities – all of which endure regardless of the March election results.

Signs of Progress

The voters' enactment of the MHSOAC in 2004 was a foundational commitment to fund and transform the system of services and supports. To advance these commitments over the last four years, the Commission partnered with communities, other public agencies, and the private sector to identify critical gaps in the service system and directed technical assistances and resources to encourage a more proactive and comprehensive approach.

To accelerate learning and adaptation, the Commission worked with counties to invest \$800 million in MHSOAC innovation funds and provided more than \$400 million in incentive grants.

The Commission grew the state's Early Psychosis Intervention Plus programs, rapidly deployed some \$150 million statewide to support mental health wellness programs in schools, developed a state prevention and early intervention framework and voluntary standards to support workplace mental health, and empowered the advocacy efforts of eight underserved and vulnerable communities.

The Commission worked with counties to strengthen the wrap-around support of Full-Service Partnerships, improve crisis response and reduce

avoidable incarceration. It developed and began the implementation of a state suicide prevention strategy.

Through all of these efforts, the Commission worked with its partners to raise awareness and elevate expectations for a maturing mental health system focused on prevention, recovery and resilience in all communities.

Emerging Themes – Challenges and Opportunities

The mental health landscape in California is continually evolving, and the Commission has a unique ability to rapidly respond to changing circumstances.

The mental health crisis was an epidemic before the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated negative trends. Challenges such as homelessness, substance use disorders, and youth suicide continue to worsen throughout the state. Marginalized LGBTQIA+ populations and California communities of color face significant obstacles to receiving services. Mental health practitioners and resources have never been under greater strain. However, new innovations in treatment and care delivery present opportunities to help California live up to its vision. The Commission aims to respond to these emerging trends by working in partnership to address systemic issues and advance innovative solutions.

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Increasing understanding of and need for behavioral health services

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges to the ongoing mental health crisis. More Californians and families experienced mental illness and the growing substance abuse epidemic firsthand.

An increase in mental health needs, especially in youth and children, is intensified by isolation and the impact of social media. Mental health is the #1 reason children ages 0-17 are hospitalized and suicide is the #2 cause of death for young people ages 10-24.ⁱ Marginalized and excluded populations, including those who identify as Black and Brown, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander; girls and women; the LGBTQIA+ community, and those with disabilities, continue to face heightened challenges. Structural inequities and macro threats, such as racism, the climate crisis, socioeconomic inequality, housing instability and gun violence, also lead to worse mental health outcomes and an increased need for mental health care and supportive services.

Behavioral health elevated as a shared priority

Through the MHSA, communities are prioritizing prevention, early intervention, community-defined practices, innovation, and engaging people with lived experiences. Young people are championing the conversation around mental health, while community-based organizations, schools, and counties are collaborating to deliver care where needed. This momentum is elevating mental health as a policy and funding priority in California. Increased one-time funding through new initiatives like the California Children and Youth Behavioral Health

Initiative, Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program and the Mental Health Student Services Act are supplemented by reforms to existing systems such as CalAIM.

Mental health services are attracting the attention of philanthropic donors and private investors. From 2018-2020, over \$9.8 billion was donated to mental health causes.ⁱⁱ Venture capital funding for digital mental health start-ups increased from \$25 million in 2011 to over \$2.5 billion in 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ

Evolutions in treatment & care delivery

The rise of mobile devices and digital capabilities has revolutionized telehealth services for mental health, with the share of tele-behavioral health outpatient visits doubling from 2019 to 2021.^{iv} Recent innovations in diagnostic technology and services are equally changing the mental healthcare landscape. For example:

- New medicines show promising results for treating chronic depression.
- Emerging interest in Psychedelics offer hope for improving options for treating disorders like major depressive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder
- Future breakthroughs in precision medicine are expected to improve disease classification, shorten treatment duration, and limit suboptimal treatment outcomes^{vi}

In tandem, care delivery is improving. Integrated and community care with a “no wrong door” approach, the shift of mental health care into

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primary care settings, expanded roles for peer providers, and the adoption of wrap-around services show promising signs for making care delivery more accessible and effective for every Californian. With these evolutions comes an increased need to integrate fragmented funding sources, streamline regulations, and evaluate efficacy of programs to ensure that highest quality of service is being delivered to Californians regardless of the delivery model.

Strain on practitioners, resources, and consumers

- Pressure on practitioners and financial resources has grown dramatically over the last four years, creating even more challenges for consumers to access care. This includes:
- Nationwide shortage and burnout of behavioral health workers. Some 50% of behavioral health providers have experienced burnout and 30% of providers left their job^{vii}
- Lack of culturally competent practitioners with lived experience. Barriers include low pay, lack of career pathways, and credentialing and licensing requirements^{viii}
- Pressure on financial resources for care. Low reimbursement rates, difficulty billing private insurers for services, and severe financial strain on hospitals contribute to soaring provider costs^{ix}
- System fragmentation and capacity constraints are complex for consumers to navigate.

These issues have resulted in 9.4 million Californians living in a community with no mental health professionals,^x necessitating a new approach to ensure there is access to care for Californians who need it.

Accelerating pace of change

The pace of change will likely continue to increase in the coming decade and bring a new host of challenges and opportunities. The next decade is expected to bring a better understanding of and responses to the impacts of genAI, social media, as well as promising innovations in consumer-centered care.

To succeed in the next decade, California needs a resilient system that can direct and integrate resources to respond to changing needs. The Commission is committed to tracking current trends to inform its strategy and priorities in the coming years.

The Imperative for Transformational Change

The next four years have the potential to be a turning point in the history of mental health care in California. Once-in-a-generation investment and public attention have set the stage for transformational change, but it will take ambitious, collective action to integrate and improve California's underlying mental health system.

The Mental Health Services Act was developed to improve financing, design, and distribution of mental health services through local delivery systems. Twenty years later, far too many Californians still suffer from the seven negative outcomes the act is intended to reduce: suicide,

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incarceration, school failure, unemployment, prolonged suffering, homelessness, and child welfare involvement.

- Transformational change will require fundamental improvements in policies, institutions, agencies and services. Transformational change:
- Necessitates a transition away from fragmented and siloed delivery to a mental health system in which integrated, culturally competent care is accessible regardless of where you live or what you look like
- Requires communities – especially the most vulnerable, high risk and historically disadvantaged residents – are empowered and supported to design services, navigate mental health care and voice their needs and priorities, so fewer families experience the agony of unaddressed mental illness
- Necessitates that agencies and institutions at the State and local level have sufficient capacity and resources – including an adequate and effective workforce and an ability to manage toward and track outcomes across services and providers – to deliver quality care and to pursue continuous improvement.

The Commission is committed to helping catalyze this change, working via partnerships and leveraging its roles and capabilities.

The Strategy to Advance Transformational Change

The Commission has supported system-level change by working closely with policymakers to align funding and authority and with counties to build their capacity to improve their response to escalating needs. With that experience, the Commission refined its core building blocks as a foundation for its future initiatives.

Core Strategic Building Blocks



The Commission's Vision

All Californians experience wellbeing through a coordinated system that prioritizes prevention, early intervention and recovery-oriented services; builds on the strengths of communities and marginalized groups; and, creates opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful and purposeful activities and helps them to thrive.

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The Commission's Mission

The Commission works to transform systems by engaging diverse communities and employing relevant data to advance policies, practices, and partnerships that generate understanding and insights, develop effective strategies and services, and grow the resources and capacity to improve positive behavioral health outcomes for every Californian.

Guiding Principles

The Commission's guiding principles and core values reflect its aspirations for the broader behavioral health system and guide Commission's actions. These principles guide the Commission's decision-making:

- Authentic collaboration with diverse communities is required to reduce disparities and improve equity.
- Outreach and engagement with individuals impacted by the behavioral health system of care is an essential element of program effectiveness
- Tailored and culturally competent services and supports are required for wellness and recovery.
- Accessible, affordable, and high-quality whole-person services and supports are required to improve outcomes.
- Partnerships across agencies and communities, as well as public understanding are essential to aligning resources, improving services, and growing the capacities to serve everyone.

- Innovation and continuous improvement are required to achieve individual and societal wellbeing.

Roles

The Mental Health Services Act crafted a distinct role for the Commission to champion the act's vision for prevention, early intervention, comprehensive services and innovation as the essential elements of an effective community mental health system.

The Commission's membership – consumers, family members, lawmakers, health and mental health care providers, education and law enforcement professionals, and employers and labor – provide access and voice to those constituencies who rely upon and share responsibility for the kind of system Californians need and want.

The Commission, with support from the Legislature, has given that charge greater specificity to advance specific aspects of the mental health system, and has encouraged and endorsed the Commission's intentional efforts to assume the roles required to shape policies and drive practices to build out a robust continuum of services and supports.

These roles, distinct within state government, require it to work with public, private and civic partners to pragmatically drive system-level improvements.

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<p>The Commission engages people with lived experience, family members, educators, employers, policymakers, service providers, community members, program administrators, the private sector, and other partners to:</p>	
	<p>Build understanding of the potential to improve wellbeing and champion a common commitment to support the behavioral health of all Californians.</p>
	<p>Accelerate adoption of best practices to facilitate the deployment and ensure the effectiveness of best practices proven to reduce consequences of untreated behavioral health issues.</p>
	<p>Catalyze innovation to develop better practices to advance human-centered iteration, disseminate learnings, support the deployment of new administrative practices, services and supports that address needs inadequately met by existing services.</p>
	<p>Provide accountability and oversight of system level performance to understand and communicate the status of system improvement efforts and to recommend additional reforms in policies and practices.</p>

Strategic Priorities & Initiatives

To catalyze system-level changes, the Commission has evolved a portfolio of initiatives supported through legislation that demonstrate the potential

for effective community-based programs to prevent and reduce the most tragic outcomes of untreated mental health needs.

In the last four years (FY 19-20 to FY 22-23), the Commission has advanced the goals of the MHSOAC through 10+ initiatives that directed approximately \$442 million across the continuum of care, including significant investments in the following areas:

- **Youth mental health** through the School Mental Health program directing more than \$200 million via the Mental Health Student Services Act, piloting all-cove Youth Drop-In Centers, leading an anti-bullying campaign, and supporting youth and peer empowerment programs.
- **Early psychosis and suicide prevention** through scaling innovative Early Psychosis Plus programs statewide, guiding the implementation of the State's Striving for Zero Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan, and supporting the Office of Suicide Prevention to coordinate and accelerate efforts.
- **Integrated community treatment** including supporting counties' crisis continuum of care services via the Mental Health Wellness Act and improving Full-Service Partnerships.
- **Criminal justice intervention** by helping 26 counties participating in six learning collaboratives to develop and deploy data-driven and financially sustainable alternatives to law enforcement responses and incarceration.

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These initiatives have revealed the potential for transformational change, and the imperative to increase the pace and scale of efforts to build a comprehensive community-based system, as articulated in its North Star Priority.

2024-27 North Star Priority

Advance early, effective and universally available services. The Commission will work to increase the pace and scale of system-level improvements to provide early, effective, integrated and comprehensive services and supports that prevent and reduce behavioral health needs before they become debilitating.

Operational Priorities

- **Build foundational knowledge.** The Commission will develop and advocate for data-based and community-derived information to drive decisions regarding finances and services toward adequacy, sustainability, efficiency, effectiveness and reductions in disparities.
- **Close the gap between what is being done and what can be done.** The Commission will work to accelerate the adoption of effective programs to reduce geographic, demographic, cultural, and socio-economic disparities in services, supports and outcomes.
- **Close the gap between what can be done and what must be done.** The Commission will drive innovation in the public-private financing, delivery of services and supports, and continuous improvement to

accelerate the development of early, effective, integrated and universally available services and supports.

Capabilities

To successfully fulfill its roles and advance its mission, the Commission relies on a strategic set of capabilities and tools aligned with the purpose:

- **Driving policy:** Research, public engagement, policy development and advocacy
- **Driving practice:** Financial incentives, technical assistance and evaluation
- **Driving transformational change:** Assessment of system performance and opportunities for improvement

Having refined its roles and its capabilities, the Commission seeks to improve its abilities to assess more precisely where interventions can reduce the most harm and produce the most benefit.

Decision-Making Approach

With new mental health challenges and potential solutions surfacing regularly, the Commission recognizes the need to adopt a rigorous, consistent methodology for assessing system-level opportunities and identifying how to best allocate finite resources.

With this goal in mind, and with support from community partners, the Commission is developing a decision-making framework. The framework is designed to help the Commission and partners:

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- Look across the portfolio, and the broader landscape, to understand opportunities for collaboration and impact
- Ensure its guiding principles (e.g., health equity) are integrated into all future activities
- Consider tradeoffs between investing in proven interventions vs. piloting new approaches
- Design and evolve programs to address community priorities and maximize outcomes for target populations
- Standardize and strengthen its approach to collecting and using data to measure the impact of a project

- Define success for each opportunity, identify level of effort and resources required to deliver, and calibrate investments.

The framework establishes four key criteria to guide decision-making:

1. **Need:** The extent to which the opportunity addresses a growing or emerging need in an underserved population or underfunded area
2. **Impact:** The extent to which the opportunity is expected to have a high return on investment and tangible benefit to the target populations and broader mental health system, including through the reduction of disparities
3. **Fit:** The extent to which pursuing the opportunity aligns with the Commission’s mission, strategic priorities, and



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differentiated roles and will complement and advance existing efforts

4. **Feasibility:** The extent to which the opportunity has a clear definition of success and path to sustainability given the level of effort required and the available resources

The framework is designed to balance needs for rigor and flexibility, to support decision-making across a variety of topics and contexts over the coming years, including evaluating early-stage opportunities and - with the support of a companion tool - guiding the design and evaluation of specific initiatives. The Commission intends to utilize this framework to understand opportunities and their potential contributions to system improvements and understand what the Commission can contribute to accelerate progress toward those outcomes.

The Commission recognizes its role as one partner in an evolving ecosystem, considering the long-term sustainability of each project. With every new opportunity that arises, the Commission will aim to clearly define what success looks like and in doing so, to determine the level of effort and resources required to either bring it to fruition or transition it to a partner.

The Commission expects to continue to engage at a variety of different levels, from high-touch efforts (such as the roll-out of MHSSA-funded programs, and the scale-up of Early Psychosis Plus and allcove models) to low-touch efforts (such as ongoing support for the Office of Suicide Prevention). This will also allow the Commission to consider how

programs may be sustained and scaled over time, beyond one-time grant funding.

The Commission has integrated the framework into its operations by publishing on its website; encouraging Commissioners, partners, and the public to use it when sharing comments about a proposed initiative; comparing it against the emerging themes and priorities outlined in this Strategic Plan; and integrating it into RFAs and planning grant applications. The Commission has also developed a detailed governance plan for the rollout and implementation of the framework.

Goals and Objectives for 2024-2027

The Commission aims to advance its vision of “wellbeing for all Californians” and fulfill its roles through the following goals.

1. **Champion Vision to Action.** The Commission will engage with communities, analyze data, and confer with experts and partners to advance the evolution of policies necessary to provide an early, effective and universally available system of behavioral health services and supports.
2. **Advance Best Practice Models:** The Commission will engage communities, experts, and public and nongovernmental service providers to accelerate the effective implementation of best practice models that together provide universal access to quality services and supports.

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- 3. *Inspire Innovation and Learning.*** The Commission will develop strategies and partnerships to catalyze innovation and disseminate learnings to accelerate the development of new models and practices that further improve behavioral health and wellbeing.
- 4. *Relentlessly Drive Improvement.*** The Commission will work with communities and partners to increase understanding, empathy and empowerment as a way to bolster public ownership, expectations and accountability for improvement of the public behavioral health system.

From Plan to Action

This Strategic Plan represents the Commission’s latest thinking at the time that it is approved. It is intended to support and guide the Commission as they work in partnership to accelerate progress toward outcomes that advance the mental health system and better deliver for California’s consumers and families. The Commission expects this plan will evolve and change as the landscape of need, funding streams, and opportunities for impact evolve over the coming years.

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Sources

- ⁱ [The 2020 California Children's Report Card](#)
- ⁱⁱ [Candid](#) (2021)
- ⁱⁱⁱ [Rock Health](#) (2021)
- ^{iv} [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) (2022)
- ^v [World Economic Forum](#) (2021)
- ^{vi} [American Physiological Society](#) (2023)
- ^{vii} [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (2022)
- ^{viii} [Healthforce Center at UCSF](#) (2018)
- ^{ix} [Association of American Medical Colleges](#) (2022)
- ^x [NAMI California](#) (2021)

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