



Summary of the Roundtable on Transformational Change

October 7, 2021
9:00 AM–11:00 AM

Background

The Innovation component of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) advances transformational change of the mental health system by providing vision and funding to test novel approaches that improve outcomes for all Californians. To promote an ecosystem that supports innovation, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission developed the Innovation Incubator. It was created in 2018 with \$5 million in one-time funding. The Incubator was designed to support county efforts to build and implement novel strategies and provide guidance on the use of MHSA Innovation funds to develop, adapt, or refine more effective services and supports.

Along with supporting counties in their Innovation projects, the Innovation Incubator was intended to support system-level changes and to reveal new ways for the State and counties to work better together to support innovation and continuous improvement. The Commission partnered with the public policy program at the McGeorge School of Law to convene thought leaders to assess what is being learned about incubating innovation and how to evolve and scale such efforts to catalyze transformational change.

The Roundtable was held on Thursday, October 7, 2021 via a Zoom video call. Jake Segal, the Vice President of Social Finance, facilitated the discussion. Participants included contractors from Innovation Incubator projects, staff from county behavioral health departments, leadership from McGeorge and the Commission, and other mental health advocates. A post-meeting survey was conducted in the two days that followed, gathering further feedback from meeting participants. This document summarizes the feedback collected.

Convening Summary

Roundtable participants touched on many of the same themes we heard from the Convening of Innovation Incubator project partners in August, including the importance of:

- Understanding the county context and the infrastructure and resources available before the project begins.
- A thorough planning phase that includes a broad vision of the problem and how the project aims to solve it, setting clear and achievable goals, and identifying county touchpoints and project partners.
- Having project monitoring built in to collect data, track progress, and assess needs on an ongoing basis.

- Regular and frequent stakeholder engagement throughout all phases of the project, including project staff, peers and people with lived experience, and leadership at the state and county level.
- Cross-county knowledge and information sharing throughout the life of the project, including sharing resources, templates, and lessons learned.

In particular, the cross-county knowledge and information sharing was identified as vital for successful innovation. Participants noted that counties need to start with an understanding of what has been done before, what works, and—perhaps most importantly—what hasn’t worked. This knowledge sharing can ensure that counties don’t “start from scratch” when there is helpful information available to guide project development, or even shift project goals if there are effective approaches already tested and proven by other counties to solve the problem identified and targeted by the project.

In addition to these insights, participants mentioned the importance of setting expectations and approaching innovation with the right perspective: the understanding that it’s okay to “fail,” and that the goal is to learn. Continuous quality improvement is achieved through incremental learning, through the slow accumulation of knowledge and by building off of previous learnings.

Participants also identified some of the key factors in state-county partnerships in general. Chief among these factors is relationship building. Making meaningful connections within and between counties and partners at the state level forges the network that underpins project success. These relationships are not only vital at the beginning of a project; they also facilitate the sharing of information and resources during project implementation and the continuation of the project’s important work beyond the official end date.

Related to this insight is the need for innovation to happen collaboratively. Participants noted that real transformational change happens across systems, through breaking down silos and bringing agencies, departments, and other groups together. Further, the varied funding streams lead to patchwork funding of innovation from different sources, making it difficult to collaborate.

Another key factor is recognizing state and county roles in innovation; namely, that the county is the lead and the state is the support. Participants emphasized that counties know their context and their problems, and can identify their own solutions. The state can best promote innovation by acting as a support for counties, providing guidance, offering technical assistance, and facilitating cross-county connections, rather than imposing inflexible standards or one-size-fits-all solutions.

Post-Convening Feedback

A post-convening feedback survey was conducted immediately following the Roundtable. A link to the survey was sent via email to each contractor the afternoon of October 7, 2021. Six responses were collected between October 7, 2021 and October 8, 2021.



Survey respondents agreed that the convening was either “very valuable” (67%) or “extremely valuable” (33%).

When asked if there was anything they didn’t get to share during the Roundtable, respondents mentioned (1) a suggestion for the Commission to set benchmarks for counties to achieve with their innovation projects, and (2) the urgent need for scaling up the Incubator model to include more counties, focus on more topics, and dive much deeper.

The survey asked respondents to identify the barriers to bringing the insights and lessons learned from innovation up to scale. Respondents noted the low bandwidth of county staff (n=2), the lack of opportunities to share learnings, successes, and “failures” across the state (n=2), the lack of sustainable, long-term funding (n=1), a perspective that doesn’t contribute to innovation (n=1), a focus on program innovation when the real transformation follows system innovation (n=1), and the time, training, and adaptation requirements of turning insights into transformational change (n=1).

In terms of improvements that can be made to the Incubator model, respondents recommended scaling up the model to include more collaboratives and tailoring solutions to the county’s problems and priorities (n=1), creating a repository of successful innovation work (n=1), setting statewide goals counties can work towards achieving with Incubator funding (n=1), and encouraging more grassroots community involvement, including private sector and nonprofit leadership and community organizations (n=1).