

September 1, 2022

Mara Madrigal-Weiss, Chair
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability
Commission
1812 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95811



RE: Initial Comments on Draft PEI Report

Dear Chair Madrigal-Weiss,

Mental Health America appreciates the opportunity to provide our initial comments on the Commission's Draft PEI Report, *Well and Thriving, Prevention and Early Intervention in California*. We may submit more detailed comments at a later date.

The mission of Mental Health America of California (MHAC) is to ensure that people of all ages, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, language, race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, spirituality, religion, age or socioeconomic status who require mental health services and supports are able to live full and productive lives, receive the mental health services and other services that they need, and are not denied any other benefits, services, rights, or opportunities based on their need for mental health services.

MHAC truly appreciates the work that was put into creation of this Draft Report. The report includes extensive and meaningful recommendations to the State that, if implemented, could substantially improve the mental health of Californians. Our comments at this time are not related so much to what is *included* within the report, but to an element of SB 1004 (Wiener, 2018) that is *not included* within the report.

RECOMMENDATION: The Draft Report should add, as an additional priority, Recommendation #1 adopted by the Commission's Cultural and Linguistic Competence Committee (CLCC) on December 8, 2021

Senate Bill 1004 mandates the Commission to establish priorities for the use of county MHSA PEI funds, which must include the priorities listed in the bill, and may include additional priorities (WIC Section 5840.7. (a)). Yet nothing in the Draft Report mentions which priorities the Commission has chosen to establish. In addition, the Draft Report mentions that the MHSOAC's own committee, the CLCC, approved 4 recommendations (2 of which are specifically related to the priorities listed in SB 1004), yet the Draft Report does not state whether those 2 recommendations will be adopted by the MHSOAC as additional PEI priorities.

SB 1004 included, as a priority for PEI funding, youth outreach and engagement strategies that target secondary school and transition age youth, *with a priority on partnership with college mental health programs*. The CLCC's first adopted recommendation is to: "Emphasize transition age youth generally under the identified

priorities in Senate Bill 1004 (Wiener, 2018).” We agree wholeheartedly with this recommendation.

The California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN), a youth-led program of MHAC has consistently advocated for access to behavioral health services, including MHSA PEI services, for all youth regardless of whether or not they are enrolled in college or university. Along these lines, we agree with the CLCC that prioritizing youth who are enrolled in college disadvantages transition age youth of color. Furthermore, youth who are enrolled in college have access to on-campus mental health resources that are not available to those who are not enrolled, and these youth are often privately insured, while youth not enrolled in college are less likely to have private insurance. Additionally, youth enrolled in college who temporarily leave school due to mental health challenges will not only lose access to on-campus services, under SB 1004, they would also not be prioritized for community PEI services. If they are University of California students enrolled in the campus insurance program, they lose both their health insurance and access to on-campus resources if they take any time off of school, which is not uncommon for students who live with mental health challenges.

The MHSA was written to increase community-based mental health services for everyone who needs them, not just those who are fortunate enough to attend college, and we respectfully request the Commission to broaden the existing priority to include all Transition Age Youth regardless of college enrollment status.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on the Draft Report and we are grateful for the tireless efforts of Commission Staff in drafting the report. Please feel free to contact me or our Interim Public Policy Director, Karen Vicari (kvicari@mhaofca.org) if you have any questions or would like more information.

In Community,



Heidi L. Strunk
President & CEO