

To:	BHS Community Partners and Contracted Providers
From:	Behavioral Health Services
Date:	October 7, 2026
Title	BHS Community Engagement During BHSA Implementation

Overview

In January 2025, BHS shared plans to transition several regional and System of Care (SoC) Council meetings toward a broader, more coordinated approach to stakeholder engagement in preparation for implementation of California's Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA). During the transition, BHS continued engagement through other activities while incorporating evolving State guidance into its Community Planning Process (CPP), a State-required process for gathering input to inform counties' BHSA Integrated Plans. Between April 2025 and early 2026, BHS conducted more than 100 community engagement activities involving more than 1,900 participants, including representatives from over 280 organizations, and received more than 300 formal public comments on the draft 2026–2029 BHSA Integrated Plan. Together, these efforts supported development of San Diego County's first BHSA Integrated Plan, approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors on June 9, 2026.

With the Integrated Plan approved, BHS is moving into implementation while continuing diverse community engagement consistent with BHSA requirements. BHS will continue engaging community members and partners throughout implementation to identify emerging needs and opportunities for improvement and inform future Integrated Plan updates. This Information Notice describes how that engagement will continue during implementation and connect to coordination, outcomes, equity, and system improvement.

Building on Prior Efforts

The updated engagement approach builds on what stakeholders valued about former meetings that were paused while responding to opportunities identified through community input. Stakeholders emphasized the following:

- Maintaining direct dialogue with BHS, subject matter experts, providers, community partners, and people with lived experience;
- Creating more space for two-way discussion, shared learning, and problem-solving;
- Bringing a broader range of diverse perspectives into conversations about issues that cut across the behavioral health system and related sectors;
- Creating additional opportunities for cultural and linguistic perspectives to inform engagement; and
- Strengthening feedback loops so stakeholders can better understand how their input is considered and what happens next.

These priorities align with BHSA expectations for ongoing engagement, inclusive participation, and stronger cross-sector coordination. Moving forward, BHS will use a range of engagement approaches to support diverse community participation, coordination, feedback, continuous improvement, and future Integrated Plan updates.

Optimal Care Collaboratives

As one component of this approach, BHS is establishing four new Optimal Care Collaboratives (OCCs) as recurring forums for cross-sector engagement and coordination during BHSA implementation. The OCCs will focus on shared issues that affect how people experience and move through the local behavioral health system, including access and navigation, family well-being and school partnerships, housing stability and homelessness prevention, and recovery, diversity and community integration. OCC discussions will build on themes identified through CPP activities conducted during Fiscal Year 2025-2026 (BHSA baseline year) and will be informed by

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community experience, local and regional data and insights, statewide behavioral health goals, and BHS Optimal Care Pathways models. Together, these inputs will help participants examine how people access and move through services and supports across the continuum, with attention to navigation, coordination, transitions between levels of care, and continuity of care.

Working Together During Implementation

OCCs will bring together people with lived experience, family members, community organizations, providers, schools, health plans, public agencies, and other partners with experience, knowledge, or a role connected to each OCC focus area. The convenings will create opportunities to bring different perspectives together through focused discussion, shared learning, and collaboration across different parts of the local system. Through the OCCs, participants will have opportunities to:

- Discuss community experience, implementation updates and challenges, data, and emerging needs;
- Identify opportunities for stronger coordination and shared problem-solving across sectors; and
- Help connect stakeholder input to planning, quality improvement, outcomes monitoring, and future BHSA Integrated Plan updates.

Inclusive Engagement and Access

BHS recognizes that no single engagement approach will reach every community or provide every type of input needed during BHSA implementation. OCCs are intended to support recurring cross-sector dialogue on system-level issues but are only one part of BHS' broader community planning and engagement efforts. BHS will continue using multiple approaches, including department-led and contractor-led engagement and participation in community-led meetings and convenings. These approaches will help reach populations and individuals who may be less likely to participate in system-level forums and create additional opportunities for lived experience, family, and community perspectives to inform planning and improvement.

Inclusive engagement also supports State efforts related to culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate care, health equity, and disparity reduction. Community input and available data can help identify cultural and linguistic disparities, language access needs, workforce and training considerations, and other opportunities for improvement as State guidance evolves.

Next Steps

The department will launch the OCC structure with an in-person kickoff in November, a virtual briefing tentatively anticipated in December, and recurring department-led convenings to begin in late January 2027. Participation information, updates, and meeting materials will be shared through the department's community engagement webpages and other County communication channels.

Learn More

- [Connect with BHS Webpage](#) – Access BHS' Community Request Form and view engagement opportunities
- [County BHSA Webpage](#) – San Diego County Integrated Plan and BHSA implementation information
- [DHCS BHSA County Policy Manual](#) – State requirements and guidance for BHSA implementation

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