



BHSA

Behavioral Health Care Continuum

Background

In February 2025, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) released a Behavioral Health Transformation Policy Manual, a comprehensive guide for counties, behavioral health providers, Tribal leaders, and other behavioral health stakeholders to implement the Behavioral Health Transformation requirements as detailed in the BHSA.

The Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) requires counties to submit three-year Integrated Plans (IPs) for Behavioral Health Services and Outcomes. The IP must include how county behavioral health departments plan to use all available behavioral health funding (i.e., BHSA, 1991 and 2011 Realignment, federal grant programs, federal financial participation from Medi-Cal, opioid settlement funds, local funding, and other funding) to meet statewide and local outcome measures, reduce disparities, and address the unmet need in their community.

Each county's Integrated Plan (IP) and its associated budget template is required to describe how it will spend behavioral health dollars across a care continuum. Specifically, each county is required to demonstrate how it will utilize various funds for behavioral health services to deliver high quality, culturally responsive, and timely care along the continuum of services in the least restrictive setting.

Behavioral Health Continuum

The Behavioral Health Care Continuum is composed of two distinct frameworks: 1) Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and 2) Mental Health (MH) Services, with crisis intervention services integrated throughout both. These frameworks will allow counties to describe their expenditures across key service categories, identify gaps in their service continuum, and articulate the investments they will make to expand access, close identified gaps, and improve performance as indicated through statewide behavioral health goals.

Discrete Service Categories	Behavioral Health Continuum							Housing Intervention Services
	Primary Prevention Services	Early Intervention Services	Outpatient Services	Intensive Outpatient	Crisis and Field Based Services	Residential Treatment Services	Inpatient Services	
Discrete MH Service Categories	Primary Prevention Services	Early Intervention Services	Outpatient & Intensive Outpatient Services	Crisis Services	Residential Treatment Services	Hospital/ Acute Services	Subacute/ Long-Term Care Services	

Service Category Definitions

The Policy Manual includes definitions for the SUD and MH Service categories, as outlined below.

SUD Service Categories	Service Category Definition	Example SUD Services
Population Prevention Services	Includes services and activities that educate and support individuals to prevent substance misuse and substance use disorders from developing. These services/activities offer communities support in identifying and addressing issues, tools for coping with stressors and information on ways to promote resiliency. They may also include services and public health campaigns focused on overdose prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substance use disorder education, such as paid media campaigns regarding “fentapills” Targeted prevention, such as SUBG-funded prevention screenings and referrals
Early Intervention Services	Includes interventions that take a proactive approach to identifying and addressing substance use issues among individuals who are showing early signs, or are at risk, of a substance use disorder. These interventions, such as outreach, access and linkage, and treatment services, help avert the development of a severe and disabling condition, discourage risky behaviors and support individuals in maintaining healthy lifestyles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screenings Brief intervention, American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) level 0.5 Evidence-based practices, like motivational interviewing
Outpatient Services	Includes a variety of therapeutic substance use disorder services that can be provided anywhere an individual is located, such as in school, home, clinic, office, or other outpatient settings. These services may help avert the need for, or be provided after, crisis care, inpatient, or residential treatment. These services are provided, if necessary, as part of stabilization and continued recovery/ongoing evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASAM level 1.0, including individual and group therapy Contingency Management Narcotic/Opioid Treatment Programs
Intensive Outpatient Services	Includes services to support individuals living with higher acuity SUD needs who may require assistance at a higher frequency and/or intensity, sometimes via a team-based approach. These services offer structure and monitoring when more support than routine outpatient visits is necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASAM levels 2.1-2.5

SUD Service Categories	Service Category Definition	Example SUD Services
Crisis and Field-Based Services	Includes a range of services that engage, assess, stabilize, treat, and/or coordinate care for individuals in need of substance use disorder services in field settings (e.g., homeless encampments, shelters, or syringe service programs). Services may be delivered in non-traditional settings where individuals work or reside.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile crisis • Assertive field-based initiation for substance use disorder treatment services • Post overdose follow up
Residential Treatment Services	Includes low- to high-intensity clinically managed residential treatment. Services may be delivered in short-term residential settings of any size.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASAM level 3.1-3.5 care
Inpatient Services	Includes 24-hour, intensive treatment services to individuals who require medical management or medical monitoring for substance use disorder needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASAM levels 3.7-4.0 • SUD services within a general acute care hospital (GACH), acute psychiatric hospital (APH), psychiatric health facility (PHF), or mental health rehabilitation center (MHRC)
Housing Intervention Services (<i>reporting is aggregated with the mental health framework</i>)	Includes services and supports designed to enable individuals to remain in their homes or obtain housing to support recovery and improved health outcomes. Services help individuals find and retain housing, support recovery and resiliency, and/or maximize the ability to live in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent supportive housing • Housing tenancy and sustaining services • Recovery residences and sober living homes • Rent • Interim Settings

MH Service Categories	Service Category Definition	Example MH Services
Population Prevention Services	Includes services and activities that educate and support individuals to prevent acute or chronic conditions related to mental health from ever developing. These services/activities may offer communities support in identifying and addressing issues before they turn into problems, tools for coping with stressors and information on ways to promote resiliency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health education, such as public health campaigns for suicide prevention or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) awareness • Community Health Workers
Early Intervention Services	Includes interventions that take a proactive approach to identifying and addressing mental health issues among individuals who are showing early signs, or are at risk, of a mental health disorder. These interventions, such as outreach, access and linkage, and treatment services, help avert the development of a severe and disabling condition, discourage risky behaviors and support individuals in maintaining healthy lifestyles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screenings • Evidence-based practices, such as coordinated specialty care for first episode psychosis
Outpatient & Intensive Outpatient Services	Includes a variety of therapeutic mental health services that can be provided anywhere an individual is located, such as in school, home, clinic, office, field settings (e.g. homeless encampments, shelters, etc.) or other outpatient settings. Also includes services to support individuals living with higher acuity mental health needs who may require assistance at a higher frequency and/or intensity, sometimes via a team-based approach. These services may help avert the need for, or be provided after, crisis care, inpatient or residential treatment and are provided, if necessary, as part of stabilization and continued recovery/ongoing evaluation. They may also offer structure and monitoring when more support than routine outpatient visits is necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual therapy • Group therapy • Assertive Community Treatment/ Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (ACT/FACT) • High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) • Intensive Outpatient Treatment/Day Treatment Intensive
Crisis Services	Includes a range of services and supports that assess, stabilize, and treat individuals experiencing acute distress. Services are designed to provide relief to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, including through de-escalation and stabilization techniques, and may be delivered in clinical and non-clinical settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis call centers • Crisis stabilization • Crisis residential services • Mobile Crisis

MH Service Categories	Service Category Definition	Example MH Services
Residential Treatment Services	Includes intensive treatment services that are provided in a structured, facility-based setting to individuals who require consistent monitoring for mental health needs on a longer-term basis. Services may be delivered in short-term residential settings to divert individuals from or as a step-down from hospital and acute services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult residential treatment services
Hospital and Acute Services	Includes treatment services that are provided in structured, hospital settings to individuals who require consistent monitoring and stabilization. These services may include comprehensive psychiatric treatment, including medication adjustments, and acute withdrawal services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services within a psychiatric health facility (PHF), acute psychiatric hospital (APH), or psychiatric unit within a general acute care hospital (GACH).
Subacute and Long-Term Care Services	Includes intensive licensed skilled nursing care provided to patients with mental health needs, most frequently delivered in a skilled nursing facility (SNF) and special treatment programs (STPs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services within a SNF & SNF-STP Services within a MHRC
Housing Intervention Services <i>(reporting is aggregated with the substance use disorder framework)</i>	Includes services and supports designed to enable individuals to remain in their homes or obtain housing to support recovery and improved health outcomes. Services help individuals find and retain housing, support recovery and resiliency, and/or maximize the ability to live in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent supportive housing Housing tenancy and sustaining services Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE) and Adult Residential Care Facilities (ARF) Rent Interim Settings