ORANGE COUNTY



Happy Hummingbird
By Cynthia Moreno

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

OC health CARE AGENCY

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES



Flamboyant
By Kristin Sherk

ORANGE COUNTY 2025 BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Doug Chaffee
Chairman



4th District Supervisor

Katrina Foley
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MESSAGE FROM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES DIRECTOR

The OC Health Care Agency's (HCA) Behavioral Health Services (BHS) is proud to continue its partnership with the Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) in presenting the BHAB Annual Report to the Orange County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and to the many community stakeholders we serve. In 2025, our focus remained steadfast: delivering accessible, high quality mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery services for all Orange County residents.

Throughout the past year, the BHAB has played a vital role in elevating community awareness about behavioral health needs, reducing stigma, and championing the principles of recovery, wellness, and resilience. Their advocacy and their commitment to including diverse community perspectives continue to strengthen the behavioral health system of care.

BHS has worked closely with the BHAB to review emerging needs, provide insights into the current system, and collaborate on meaningful improvements across programs and services. This partnership has been essential as we navigate a rapidly evolving State and Federal landscape and prepare for significant shifts in behavioral health policy and practice.

I am continually inspired by the BHAB's dedication, thoughtful leadership, and unwavering support for our community. The year ahead will bring challenges, but also opportunities to reshape services in ways that more effectively meet the needs of Orange County's residents. With our shared commitment and collaboration, I am confident we will continue moving the system forward—together.

It remains an honor to work alongside the BHAB in advancing recovery oriented, culturally responsive, and community driven behavioral health services.



Ian Kemmer, LMFT
Director, Behavioral Health Services



Jelly Fish
By Chantel Daitch

ABOUT THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Annual Report of the Behavioral Health Advisory Board is submitted in accordance with the California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 5604.2(a). Under state law the BHAB is required to review and evaluate the behavioral health needs, services, and special projects in the Orange County community. The BHAB's requirements also include advising the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and Behavioral Health Services Director as to any aspect of the local behavioral health programs.

The BHAB is comprised of 14 volunteer members, plus one member of the BOS. Each supervisor makes an individual appointment, and the BHAB Nominating Committee also recommends the appointments of new members. The categories of membership include:

- Member of the BOS
- Consumer
- Family Member
- Veteran
- Local Education Agency Employee
- Treatment and Recovery Specialist / Prevention Specialist
- Public Interest

The BHAB serves as a link between the community to the BOS and BHS by enhancing public input into the execution of community behavioral health care services. The BHAB met regularly, holding two meetings each month: a Study Committee meeting and a General Meeting. Their meetings are open to the public and public comments are encouraged to voice community input on all aspects of behavioral health services.

MESSAGE FROM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR

In 2025 the Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) continued to broaden its focus on several vital issues that impact the delivery of behavioral health services to the Orange County community. To assist in accomplishing this, the BHAB realigned its internal structure and membership requirements to ensure compliance with state guidelines and expand its perspective.

For example, the BHAB moved from a committee-based structure to an ad hoc workgroup approach for addressing issues or topics of special interest. This will allow for a more focused and time-specific process of conducting reviews and evaluations beyond the former committee format. In addition, new requirements in the Welfare & Institutions Code with respect to required board membership involve ensuring that at least one member is 25 years of age or younger (appointment pending), and one member who is an employee of a local education agency (recruitment completed).

In 2025, a significant amount of time was dedicated to monitoring the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) community planning process which included receiving presentations by, and ongoing discussions with, the Mental Health Services Act Senior Manager and Behavioral Health Director. BHAB members also attended various BHSA planning meetings, focus groups, educational and listening sessions, community forums, and workgroups throughout the year as a means of tracking the planning process for the eventual BHSA three-year integrated plan due in 2026.

BHAB members also closely observed efforts by the County to address the following major developments impacting the local community behavioral health system:

- Implementation of Senate Bill 43
- Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court
- Proposition 36
- Be Well
- Behavioral health issues impacting older adults

These issues will continue to be monitored going forward.

In 2025, the BHAB submitted recommendations to the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the Behavioral Health Director that included:

1. Addressing the inconsistencies and confusion regarding the date ranges for the data collected on youth suicide at the state and local level.
2. Adjustments in the tracking of the number of involuntary psychiatric hospitalizations by age group
3. Expanding the method of tracking and reporting the types of individuals who

participate in General Community Suicide Prevention Trainings annually (e.g., parents, youth, educators, transitional-age youth, etc.).

4. Ensuring the timely preparation and release of the annual Orange County Child Death Review Team report.
5. Expanding public access to Naloxone by including options for 24/7 distribution sites.

Moving forward to 2026, the BHAB plans to focus on the following additional priority areas:

1. BHSA Integrated Plan implementation
2. Suicide Prevention Efforts: Substance Use Disorder (SUD), Mental Health with a focus on Older Adults and LGBTIQ+
3. Law Enforcement disengagement policies
4. Substance Use Disorder Continuum of Care
5. Behavioral Health Workforce development
6. OC Links

The BHAB welcomes the involvement and input from the community and encourages the virtual and in-person participation of consumers and their family members in our regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The ongoing activities of the BHAB and the schedule of upcoming meeting dates, agendas and location can be found by clicking here.

Sincerely,



Alan Albright, LMFT
Chair, Behavioral Health Advisory Board



Catching Bundles of Joy
By David Guzman

COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS

BHAB COMMITTEES IN 2025

- Study Committee
- Executive Committee
- Children and Youth Services Committee (Concluded June 2025)
- Adults Services Committee (Concluded June 2025)
- Older Adults Services Committee (Concluded June 2025)

ADULT SERVICES COMMITTEE

Steven McNally, Chair

A review of the following specific issues by the Adult Services Committee were initiated in 2025 and incorporated both participant dialogue, community input; and information provided by various Behavioral Health Services staff:

- Increase community participation in the BHAB and committee process. Areas such as organizational development, communications tools, meeting dates and times, and access to information are being explored (ongoing).
- Community access and awareness of Crisis Services, OC Links, OC Navigator. Measuring awareness and impact.
- Exploring quality of services received through post survey data.
- CAT/ PERT
- Discussions around Law Enforcement disengagement policies.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES COMMITTEE

Linda Smith, Chair

A review of the following specific issues by the Children and Youth Services (CYS) Committee was conducted in 2025 and incorporated information requests by the committee and presentations provided by various Behavioral Health Services staff:

- Youth suicide rates in Orange County (ongoing)
- Referral Process for Children and Timely Access to Services (completed)
- Services for children who identify as LGBTQI+ (ongoing)
- Overview of Children and Youth Full Services Partnerships (FSP) and programs
- SB 531: Student Mental Health Education
- Timeliness of CYS services

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER SERVICES COMMITTEE

Fred Williams, Chair

A review of the following specific issues by the Substance Use Disorder Services Committee were conducted in 2025 and incorporated both information requests by the committee and presentations provided by various Behavioral Health Services staff:

- SUD Residential Services and Outpatient Services
- Withdrawal Management
  The Committee recommended and conducted a total of three (3) site visits: Vera's Sanctuary, ART team, and Phoenix House Outpatient Program. They provided evaluation reports to the BHS.

OLDER ADULTS SERVICES COMMITTEE

Chase Wickersham, Chair

Activity around the following specific issues by the Older Adult Services Committee occurred in 2025 and incorporated both participant dialogue, community input; information requested by the committee from, and presentations provided by various Behavioral Health Services staff:

- The committee continued to stay informed and up to date on the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation (INN) P.I.V.O.T. project, Older Adult Component. This was a recommendation that was brought about by this committee in 2024, which offered funding for such a program for older adults with co-occurring neurocognitive disorders and mental health conditions. With the Oversight and Accountability Commission's (OAC) recent approval of this project, the OAC expects to expand its support into the implementation phase.
- Overview and outcomes for the OASIS Program
- Discussion about the sunsetting of the NAMI Warmline
- Neurocognitive decline in older adults with psychiatric disorders
- Board and Cares and RCFE beds for older adults

2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1

Community Events and Outreach: - The BHAB actively participated in community events and activated at the following tabling events:

- OC Black History Parade and Unity Festival (February)
- UCI Mental Health Fair (February)
- Meeting of the Minds (May)
- 2025 Juneteenth Celebration at Centennial Park (June)
- Irvine Valley College Health Fair (August)
- Recovery Picnic (September)
- OC Pride Parade and Festival- OC Fair and Events Center, Costa Mesa (October)
- Vanguard University Wellness Fair (October)

2

Conferences Attended by BHAB Members - BHAB members collectively attended conferences throughout the year:

- California Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions Quarterly Regional Meeting (January, April, June, October)
- Behavioral Health Planning Council Quarterly Meetings (January, April, June, October)
- Meeting of the Minds (April)
- CIT International Conference (August)
- Communities First Conference (October)

In addition to conferences, the BHAB members attended these ongoing meetings:

- Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Planning Advisory Committee
- Behavioral Health Equity Committee
- Crisis Intervention Training Steering Committee
- QMS Community Quality Improvement Committee
- Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) Regional Forums
- Community Suicide Prevention Coalition

3 **In keeping with the BHAB's responsibility to review and evaluate the community's public behavioral health needs, services, facilities, and special problems, information was presented for review by the BHAB which addressed the following programs and services:**

- February:
  - Chorus: Digital Close Loop Referral System
  - MHSA Fiscal Update
- March:
  - MHSA Annual Update for FY 2025/26
  - Child Welfare System Improvement Plan (CWSIP) Collaboration with HCA BHS
- April:
  - Public Hearing- MHSA Plan Update for FY 2025/26
  - OC Older Adults Needs Assessment Report Presentation
- May:
  - HCA Procurement Overview
- June:
  - Orange County Family Wellness Initiative
  - MHSA Fiscal Update
- July:
  - Update on Older Adult Innovation PIVOT Project
  - Early Childhood Policy Framework
  - BHSA Policy Manual
- August:
  - Substance Use Disorder Continuum of Care
  - Prop 36 Updates

  Ahead
- September:
  - OC Links Dashboard and Update
  - MHSA Fiscal Update
  - Substance Use Disorder Data Outcomes
- October:
  - OChildren and Youth Services Full-Service Partnership (FSP) Data
  - Alcove Program Overview and Site Visit
- November:
  - Substance Use Disorder Youth Prevention Efforts
- Decemberr:
  - Correctional Health Services Overview

4 **The BHAB actively attended monthly meetings of the Board of Supervisors to demonstrate support for Behavioral Health Services agenda items.**

5 **The Chair established new committees of the BHAB:**

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ADVISORIES TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The following formal communication and advisories were submitted to the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Behavioral Health Services Director in 2025:

Access to Naloxone

The BHAB reviewed Orange County's 2025 substance use disorder system of care, focusing on fentanyl education and Naloxone access. County data showed fentanyl related deaths peaked in 2021 but have since declined, a trend also seen in other counties, due in part to increased public awareness, widespread Naloxone distribution, expanded treatment services, targeted support for vulnerable populations, and strengthened law enforcement actions. Naloxone remains a proven lifesaving medication, and the County currently offers it for free at 13 distribution sites and community events. While BHAB commends these efforts, it notes that access is limited by operating hours and recommends the County adopt 24/7 Naloxone vending machines, similar to San Diego and other regions, to further expand timely public access.



AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DIRECTOR IN 2025



Loving Thomas
By Daniel Gibbs

Youth Suicide

The review of youth suicide data in Orange County shows that while suicide was reported as the leading cause of death among children ages 10–14 during 2019–2021, the actual numbers were very small, making year to year comparisons difficult and easily skewed. Although a temporary increase occurred during the peak COVID 19 years, current data indicate levels consistent with pre pandemic trends, and suicide is no longer the leading cause of death for this age group.

Since 2021, Behavioral Health Services has expanded prevention efforts through the Office of Wellness and Suicide Prevention, offering extensive community and clinical trainings that have reached over 13,000 individuals. Key recommendations by the BHAB include establishing consistent date ranges for statewide and local data, requiring age specific reporting of psychiatric holds, improving tracking of suicide prevention training participation by demographic groups, and supporting ongoing multidisciplinary child death reviews to strengthen communication, collaboration, and data quality across agencies.

MEET THE 2025 BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento
2nd District Supervisor

Alan V. Albright, LMFT
Chairman for 2025
Treatment and Recovery Specialist

Frederick Williams, LMFT
Vice Chair for 2025
Treatment and Recovery Specialist

Hector Bustos
Member from March 2023 – September 2025
Public Interest- 2nd District Appointee

Adela Cruz
Local Education Agency Employee

Carla DiCandia
Consumer

Michelle Fernandez
Family Member

Vacant BHAB positions as of 12/2025:
Family Member
Family Member
Consumer

Stephen McNally
Family Member

Chinh Tuong Nguyen
Member from March 2023 – September 2025
Public Interest- 1st District Appointee

Danielle Sena
Consumer

Linda Smith
Public Interest- 3rd District Appointee

Duan Tran, MSW
Public Interest- 4th District Appointee

Ethan Truong
Public Interest-1st District Appointee

Ethan Truong
Public Interest-1st District Appointee



Mi Evolucion Mental
By Susana Sanchez



The Power of Life
By Pierre Tran

OCBHAB
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

OC health CARE AGENCY

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OC Links 24/7
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OCNavigator.org