



Whatcom County Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC) Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: January 8th, 2024, 3:00pm-4:30pm, Hybrid – Zoom & In-Person at 800 E Chestnut St, Suite 1B

BHAC Committee Members Present: Barry Buchanan, Erika Creydt, Raylene King/Stephanie Kraft, Erika Lautenbach, Michael Massanari & Donnell Tanksley

BHAC Committee Members Absent: Shannon Boustead, Caleb Erickson, Nick Evans, Stephen Gockley, & Mullane Harrington

Whatcom Co. Health Dept. Staff/Guests: Jon Dukes, Hannah Fisk, Joe Fuller, Lacey McCarley, Perry Mowery, Riley Myers & Robin Willins

Agenda Item	Discussion
<p>1. Welcome & Roll Call</p> <p>Review and approval of 10/9/23 BHAC meeting minutes</p>	<p>Riley Myers – Roll call. A quorum is present.</p> <p>Barry Buchanan – Call the meeting to order.</p> <p>Barry Buchanan – Motion to approve minutes from the previous BHAC meeting.</p> <p>Erika Creydt – Second the motion.</p> <p><i>Motion Approved – Ayes: 4, Nays: 0, Abstain: 2</i></p>
<p>2. Mental Health Court Program</p>	<p>Robin Willins – There have been changes over the last year to the Mental Health Court (MHC) program. MHC lives in the Response Division within Whatcom County Health & Community Services. MHC is a wrap around service to help address the social determinants of health. Looking at all of the factors that brought a person into the system in the first place. Looking to improve health outcomes and reduce recidivism. Divert cases from a traditional trial tract and provide people opportunities to engage in services. The program lasts 18-24 months. There are two therapeutic courts in Whatcom, one with the county and one with the city. The program has a manager and two behavioral health specialists with a capacity of 50 members. There are currently 30 members enrolled in district court and 8 members enrolled in municipal</p>



	<p>court. The only exclusions to the program are serious violent crimes or sex offenses by statute. Referrals come from public defense or a defense attorney with an agreement from the prosecutor. People who successfully graduate the program have their charges dismissed. The five phases of the program include engagement in treatment, understanding mental health, making connections, community involvement, and housing opportunities. Challenges include limited housing and limited mental health providers. Successes include growing referrals and enrollments, adding program staff, expanding provider contracts, and increasing district court capacity. Future considerations include the court focusing on emerging mental illness, MHC in superior court, collaboration with LEAD, impact of mental health sentencing alternative, and collaboration with development of community court.</p> <p>Michael Massanari – See there has been considerable improvement in the courts from this funding. A number of years ago there was an external review of the courts and there was a significant issue contributing with the ineffectiveness of the program. One of which came from the prosecutor’s office and them not being supportive. Has this issue been resolved and is the prosecutor’s office cooperating?</p> <p>Robin Willins – Feel that there is now strong support/collaboration from the prosecutor’s office. In district court it used to be that charges weren’t dropped for everyone after graduation from the program, but that policy has now been updated.</p> <p>Perry Mowery – The court setting is very different from traditional courts. There’s almost a personal relationship between the members, the judge, and the MHC team. If individuals meet their goals for the week they are considered an all star and individuals get to choose a gift card when they meet their benchmarks.</p>
<p>3. Alternative Response Team and Co-Responder Programs</p>	<p>Jon Dukes – The Co-Responder program consists of two behavioral health specialists who work with the Whatcom County Sheriff’s office two behavioral health deputies. Developing the program to figure out what is most effective to support people in crisis out in the county. Respond to calls in pairs after doing a risk assessment. Referrals can come directly from law enforcement or community members. The Alternative Response Team (ART) is a Bellingham centric team of behavioral health specialists who respond to low acuity low risk calls from 911. ART just turned one year old this month with 1,842 individuals served and 729 unique contacts. Transportation was something identified that needed to be addressed for the community</p>



	<p>which resulted in hiring a transportation specialist that will help take people to appointments, meetings, etc. An ART behavioral health specialist (community connector) is stationed at WhatComm/911 to help ascertain if a call is a behavioral health related and where it should be sent to (ART, MCOT, HOT, etc.). Challenges have included staffing shortages and growing pains. Successes include increased number of calls, having an embedded position at 911, Vmobile access, and hiring quality candidates.</p>
<p>4. School District Funding for Behavioral Health Support</p>	<p>Joe Fuller – The county has had behavioral health contracts with all 7 school districts for at least a decade. Erika and the Health Officer met with Superintendents last summer across the county to discuss ongoing mental health needs and gaps, which evolved into service contracts for this year. All seven contracts are in place and some are still in the hiring process. Outside of Bellingham, there aren't a lot of service providers, so that's a benefit for having these contracts in place for county schools, which serve as a hub for the community. There's an RFP to expand teletherapy which will help overcome language and geographical barriers.</p> <p>Would like to quickly review the 2024 All Hands events. There will be six virtual/in-person community trainings, and there will be a re-entry simulation. There's a new Opioid Response Coordinator that started today.</p>
<p>5. Ground-Level Response and Coordinated Engagement GRACE Program</p>	<p>Lacey McCarley – The GRACE program focuses on specific health determinants including social and economic, health care, and some health behaviors. (alcohol and drug use, and nutrition and physical activity) Case Managers provide intensive support to those who are frequent EMS utilizers. Key Partners include Bellingham PD, Bellingham FD, Ferndale FD, PeaceHealth, and Whatcom EMS, Jail, and Sheriff's Office. The program is staffed with a Supervisor, a Nurse Practitioner, and five Intensive Case Managers. Caseload capacity is 90-100 individuals. Programmatic challenges include data sharing limitations and city vs county dynamics. In 2021, 100 individuals in the GRACE program reduced their system impact by \$4.2 million. The Nurse Practitioner provides acute care services with bridges to primary care, short term care management, post hospital follow-up and pre-hospital diversion, bridging behavioral health medications until primary care/behavioral health prescriber is established, and care coordination. Also developed a Street Medicine program in collaboration with the EMS office.</p>



<p>6. 23-Hour Crisis Relief Center</p>	<p>Perry Mowery – Senate Bill 5120 outlines that a 23-hour crisis relief center is a community-based facility that is licensed by the DOH, open 24/7 with a prescriber and offers access to mental health and substance use care for no more than 23 hours and 59 minutes. It will accept all behavioral health crisis walk-ins, and drop offs from first responders, and those referred from 988. The fact that people cannot stay past 23 hours and 59 minutes makes it an outpatient facility as opposed to an inpatient one. The 16-bed capacity limit for inpatient does not apply to outpatient. The Executives office sent a proposal to the state legislature last year for capital funding for a center in Whatcom County. The estimated cost would be \$9.5 million. The building would be 12,000 square feet with 32 recliner chairs. Recently heard that \$9 million was approved for the project with other resources coming in. Medicaid does not cover the full funding for operation costs, so that is something that will continue to be looked at. A possible location would be some land that the county owns out near the Anne Deacon Center for Hope off Division St. Have been working on program design and staffing models, would like to have knowledgeable providers involved in the discussions.</p> <p>Barry Buchanan – The idea to have the center near the Anne Deacon Center for Hope is similar to the model seen in Nashville where they have similar facilities very close together and they attribute much of their success to that.</p>
<p>7. Public Comment</p> <p>Adjournment</p>	<p>Public Comment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alan Friedlob – Whatcom County Representative to the North Sound BHASO • Valerie Lyon Parker – Community Member <p>Barry Buchanan – Meeting adjourned.</p>
<p>Next Meeting:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">April 8th, 2024 3:00pm-4:30pm Hybrid – In Person at 800 E Chestnut St, Suite 1B / Virtual via Zoom</p>