

Briefing Paper
Recommended Guidelines for Levels of Service

The Adult System of Care Committee (ASOC) is charged with recommending to the CMHDA new policies that promote system transformation of services and supports for adult consumers in California. Over the past year, ASOC has worked to develop a level of service structure that will provide a common language to describe how the public mental health system for adults is structured: how client characteristics and behaviors (not diagnosis) are determinants of service needs, how wellness and recovery progress is charted, and the critical need for community supports for consumers' sustained health and wellness. When counties use a standard, validated level of service instrument by which to determine client service needs, it promotes commonly agreed upon definitions or descriptions of levels of service for consumers, family members and providers. As consumer's service needs change, an objective instrument can guide the level of service decision-making process with consumers when they access services, support changes when needed, and assists in managing the use of system resources.

These guidelines were developed by ASOC leadership and committee members both at regular and special meetings, through discussions at two policy forum meetings, the benefit of a presentation and discussion with the Bay Area Mental Health Directors, the DMH Planning Counsel and a review by the CMHDA Governing Board.

At this time, CMHDA governing board recommends that ASOC present for adoption to CMHDA, the attached guidelines. Adopting them will demonstrate that CMHDA actively supports the use of a Level of Service structure and the associated services and supports as the preferred mechanism for consumer assessment, allocation of services, program planning, and stakeholder discussions. (This Policy **does not** proscribe to counties what tools to use, how to allocate or budget resources, or how to measure outcomes).

ASOC further recommends that CMHDA participate with ASOC to review and revise this document once a year in November with revisions submitted in January of each year so that the document continues to reflect the transformation of community mental health in California.

Value and Benefit of the Policy to CMHDA:

Adopting guidelines to utilize a Level of Service throughout the community mental health system will assist CMHDA and the member counties because it will:

1. Promote recovery by optimally matching the amount and kinds of services with the assessed need.

When services have been well matched with the needs of consumers, strong positive outcomes have occurred. This level of service methodology has been very successfully used with higher need clients in determining enrollment into assertive community treatment programs, and statewide the client outcomes are very strong and success demonstrable. These guidelines will apply this practice to additional populations. Additionally, the level of service design allows consumers and family members to understand their recovery progress, see service resources are determined and how services change with changing consumer characteristics and circumstances.

2. Provide a structure that will provide decision support to resource allocation, program planning and fiscal responsibility.

Levels of service will assist CMHDA members to describe to policy makers and stakeholders how the community mental health adult system works. Levels of service describes in simple terms the process used to determine services, change services, expectations of wellness and recovery. Levels of service also provide a template for understanding costs and revenues determined by staffing levels and service needs.

3. Increase collaboration and accountability with our community partners.

Levels of service provides an objective standardized description of our adult services that has already proven effective in reaching agreements with stakeholders and partners such as the Sheriff Department, Public Guardian, Primary Care Physicians and contract providers. Levels of service clearly describe the criteria of the intensity of service and the functional and psychiatric characteristics present to meet each level and the expected services and supports needed. It also assists administrators in managing the use of system resources over time and provides a clear template for anticipated costs and potential FFP revenues based on staffing levels and service needs.

NOTE ON A TWO TIERED SYTEM

In response to recent discussion about the development of a “Two-Tiered System”, ASOC recommends that CMHDA adopt this Level of Service Policy as one that applies to all adult clients who have been deemed eligible for service by public mental health.

ASOC’s position is that, whether clients are new, returning, or ongoing enrollees in the mental health system, this structure applies to them. Methods of funding (MHSA, AB2034, MIOCR, and Medi-Cal) are relevant only to the budget prospects that arise related to service array connected to a Level. The ASOC is unequivocally committed to fair and equal access to treatment for clients based only on the level of care and services needs they present with.

Having said that, there will generally NOT be adequate resources in any county to provide all the services that every clients really needs to live with stability and wellness in a community setting. Housing is limited, employment is still difficult to obtain, and a clients’ need for helpful contact by staff cannot always be met. Each county faces these challenges on a daily basis. However, the policy and the structure are designed to apply to all clients equally.

