



December 23, 2010

Stephen W. Mayberg, PhD
Department of Mental Health
1600 9th Street, Room 150
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: The Mental Health Services Act California Reducing Disparities Project

Dear Dr. Mayberg:

On behalf of the members of the California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA), I am writing to express our strong interest in improved collaboration with the contractors working on the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP). CMHDA members are committed to the values of the California Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), and we support the important work that will come from the project. As the entities responsible for the local implementation of MHSA funds, counties are invested in the success of the CRDP, and expect to be meaningfully involved in developing a comprehensive strategic plan to implement a statewide approach to reducing mental health disparities among historically underserved communities in California.

CMHDA relies upon its Ethnic Services Committee (ESC), which is comprised of County Cultural Competence/ Ethnic Services Managers (CC/ESMs), to play a key advisory role regarding policies and practices to reduce disparities in community mental health services. The CC/ESM position was designed by county mental health directors to address the increasing diversity of California. These individuals are skilled in community outreach and engagement, and acknowledge circumstances in which their participation might not be effective in building trust in ethnic and cultural communities. However, as advocates and implementers, CC/ESMs expect to be meaningful partners in the development and outcomes of the CRDP.

Considering our perspective, when it came to attention of the ESC and local mental health directors that one of the CRDP contractors --the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition (REMHDCO) -- would be forming the California MHSA Multicultural Coalition (CMMC) that is explicitly *excluding* applicants who are government employees, we were disappointed and concerned. The Coalition's fact sheet states that its "*primary goal will be to work toward the integration of cultural and linguistic competency into the public mental health system,*" and to support a "*comprehensive statewide strategic plan to identify new approaches towards the reduction of disparities.*" On a practical level, wouldn't the involvement of CC/ESMs be critical to successfully meeting these objectives? This exclusion is simply not warranted, and if applied will negatively impact the outcomes of the CRDP and the CMMC.

Rather than exclusion, we want to discuss partnership. Members of the ESC and the CRDP contractors clearly have mutual goals. The ESC has appreciated CRDP contractors attending our meetings and engaging local CC/ESMs. For example, the UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities has conducted extensive outreach to local CC/ESMs and involved them significantly in its work so far. Our shared limitation in resources simply means we should work more closely together. A strong partnership with the ESC, and more specifically with local CC/ESMs, will add significant value to the outcomes of the



CRDP. Local CC/ESMs are experts in the unmet ethnic and cultural groups in their communities and they are eager to be active partners.

To facilitate this partnership, the ESC recommends that DMH and its CRDP contractors

- Disseminate meeting and event information to county ESMs in a timely manner, and that it be posted on one central website. CMHDA staff can help with dissemination efforts through the ESC email roster.
- Participate in regional CC/ESM conference calls and meetings. Attached to this letter is the contact information for the regional ESC chairs. Regional meetings are an excellent forum for information exchange and creative strategy development. We encourage contractors to contact the regional chairs about participating in an upcoming conference call or meeting.
- Use CC/ESMs to provide and support extensive outreach to communities in their regions.
- Engage with and inform CMHDA members by attending ESC quarterly meetings.
- Support the involvement of applicants/members on the CMMC based on expertise in cultural competency and a commitment to reducing disparities, including government employees. There are numerous CC/ESMs, MHSA coordinators and county mental health directors who would be valuable participants on the CMMC. We hope that this recommendation is considered immediately, considering that the current application process will be closing January 14, 2011.

Thank you for the Department's important work and leadership on the California Reducing Disparities Project. We look forward to hearing your response to these recommendations as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Alfredo Aguirre, LCSW
Past President, California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA)
Chair, CMHDA Ethnic Services Committee

cc: C. Rocco Cheng, Pacific Clinics
Sergio Aquilar-Gaxiola, UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities
V. Diane Woods, African American Health Institute of San Bernardino County
Daniel Gould, Equality California Institute
Poshi Mikalson, Equality California Institute
Kurt Schweigman, Native American Health Center
Stacie Hiramoto, REMHDCO



Ruben Cantu, CA Pan Ethnic Health Network
Marina Augusto, Acting Director, Office of Multicultural Services, California Department of
Mental Health
Larry Poaster, Chair, Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
(MHSOAC)
Sherri Gauger, Executive Director, MHSOAC
CMHDA Ethnic Services Committee