

Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

HHS: To Serve Humans

June 22, 2023

Calaveras Network of Care

calaveras.networkofcare.org

Children, Youth & Families

Developmental Disabilities

Behavioral Health

**Public Health Assessment
& Wellness**

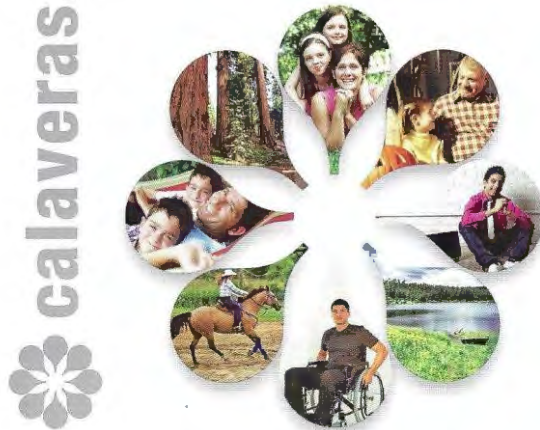
Domestic Violence

**Seniors & People
with Disabilities**

Probation Services

**Service Members,
Veterans & Their Families**

Kids (ages 0-5)



SUMMARY

The Calaveras County Health and Human Services (HHS) Agency is a large, complex organization providing the residents of Calaveras County with a wide variety of services, functions, and benefits. As part of the review process, the Calaveras County Grand Jury (CCGJ) found that there were opportunities to improve operations. HHS is partially dependent on funding from California state sources and grants in order to effectively provide services on a consistent basis. To support this funding, the CCGJ identified grant writing as one of the functions that would help benefit the departments with reliable and consistent funding. Also, state funding for mental health services is, to a large extent, dependent on compliance with the terms provided in Proposition 63. In 2004, California voters passed Prop 63 which provided additional funding to counties for mental health services. One key element of these terms is to have a Mental Health Advisory Board (MHB) to perform specific monitoring and reporting functions under Behavioral Health Services (BHS).

GLOSSARY

The following acronyms used in this report are identified below:

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| BHS | Calaveras County Behavioral Health Services |
| BOS | Calaveras County Board of Supervisors |
| CALBHBC | California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards & Commissions |
| CCGJ | Calaveras County Grand Jury |
| CEO | County Executive Officer |
| HHS | Calaveras County Health and Human Services |
| MHB | Mental Health Advisory Board |
| MHSA | Mental Health Services Act |

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand what HHS provides and how it is organized the CCGJ conducted interviews, reviewed web page information, reviewed previous CCGJ reports, and studied a variety of documents. The web pages gave us an initial overview of functions and services of HHS. Below is a list of the interviews conducted by CCGJ:

1. Calaveras County Department of Education staff
2. Calaveras County Sheriff's office staff members
3. Current and former Board of Supervisors members
4. HHS staff
5. MHB Members

We requested numerous documents not available on the websites and asked extensive questions of the interviewees. We checked local news sources, past Calaveras County and other California

counties' grand jury reports for more information. Websites of government agencies and other support organizations were also studied.

BACKGROUND

Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) is a large, diverse agency with approximately 225 employees with multiple departments and functions. There were approximately 20 open employment positions at the end of 2022. Major service categories include Human Services, Public Health, and Behavioral Health. Within BHS there are substance abuse and mental health programs. Significant financing for BHS is derived from State funding through Proposition 63, known as the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). Part of the requirements for the County to receive MHSA funding is to prepare a Three Year Plan, an Annual Plan, and to develop a Mental Health Advisory Board (MHB). The purpose of the plans and the MHB is to evaluate local programs and determine if State funds are being used efficiently.

BHS operates under the HHS program umbrella. The HHS budget represents approximately 30% of the total county budget and includes general funds and various grants. By comparison, the Sheriff's budget constitutes approximately 22% of the County budget. These are two relatively large departments within the county.

As stated on the HHS website, their vision and mission are:

“Vision: Overcoming barriers, nurturing change and improving lives.

Mission: Dedicated to engaging and strengthening the community.”

Due to the broad scope and functions of HHS, we chose to limit our scope of investigation to two areas: funding and MHSA.

DISCUSSION

Grants

Writing and submitting grant proposals can be a challenging process. Staff have a varying degree of experience and success in getting grants through the process. Even recurring grants can be a challenge especially to a new manager or director. The MHB noted in their 2020 Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) that grant writing is only part of the complexity in using grant funds effectively. The ongoing costs associated with supporting the grant vary depending on the grant and may include data collection, surveys, focus groups and other reporting requirements. The value of the grant must be adequate to cover the resources needed to meet the requirements and comply with the terms of the grant. Grant awards can be competitive with other counties and require expertise in order to win the award. Grant writing guidelines are complicated and require coordination with County leaders and agencies such as BOS, County Executive Officer (CEO), County Counsel, Human Resources and Risk, and others. Submittals are sometimes under strict guidelines or time constraints. Some counties within California contract with outside companies to find and assist in submitting grants. These counties often have greater success in completing grant applications.

The process of applying for and receiving accepted grants for the County can be extremely tedious. The BOS is the “sole authority” for any grants that a department wants to apply for and in accepting the grant. County Department Heads are authorized to execute documents required to apply for grants up to \$50,000. Grant applications have their own eligibility rules,; timing, specific

geographic and/or cultural requirements, and matching funding. Being able to move quickly to apply for a grant that could be beneficial to the County would greatly improve the chance of being awarded the grant. This brings money into the County and adds to the existing budget. With the limitations and rules around grants, plus the time it takes to write a grant proposal, it would benefit the HHS Department, and the County at large, to have a dedicated grant writing committee. This was also recommended in the 2018-2019 CCGJ Report.

Mental Health Services Act

Many of the BHS programs are funded by the MHSA as established by the passage of California's Proposition 63 in 2004. This funding is one of four main revenue streams supporting BHS programs. One purpose of the MHSA is to increase local funding for mental health programs through the State. The MHSA requires that county mental health departments prepare a three-year plan detailing how the county will spend state funds. The plan needs to be updated, posted, and available for public review and comments, annually. Another requirement is for the local BHS to work with the MHB, which is made up of interested citizens associated with mental health services either as professionals, consumers, or family of consumers.

The Calaveras County MHB is composed of between five and thirteen members, all volunteers, plus one member of the BOS. As of May 1, 2023, there are ten occupied seats and four vacancies. The MHB continues to deal with the after-effects of challenges encountered in recent years, including but not limited to: the Butte Fire, legalization of cannabis in the State and County, funding, and Covid-19. In addition to those factors, recruiting and retaining MHB members has been difficult. MHB Board member turnover continues to hinder effectiveness.

The MHB is required to prepare an annual report to the BOS describing the state funded programs, background information, and past results. Annual Reports are not standardized, making year to year comparisons of program metrics difficult to use for tracking progress. Not having consistent metrics makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of mental health services in the County. The California Association of Local Behavior Health Boards & Commissions (CALBHBC) recommends the use of goals and outcome measures to assess progress. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goals would aid in making these metrics consistent over time and be more effective in evaluating necessary changes needed.

The 2015 MHB report to the BOS was 19 pages and included several quantitative metrics for evaluating programs. Report length and detailed content declined in succeeding years. Comparative metrics were all but eliminated. Although reference is made to other more detailed reports, this report, as a standalone tool with which to evaluate trends or program effectiveness, has limited value. Reports are useful as a snapshot of specific programs, but do not provide the means to evaluate their successes. Recent reports vary in length and do not present the same information as earlier reports.

Below are some of the topics that were discussed in each of the MHB Reports. This table is to demonstrate inconsistencies in the reports over the years. Metrics such as MHSA Activities, Outreach, Behavioral Health and Housing were not included in later years:

| Topic Titles Used in Report | 2015 | 2016 | 2018 | 2022 |
|----------------------------------|------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Introduction | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Membership | yes | yes | NO | NO |
| Legislative Authority | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| General State of Mental Health | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Overall Recommendations: | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Report on MHSA Activities | yes | NO | NO | NO |
| Outreach and Engagement Services | yes | NO | NO | NO |
| Behavioral Health | yes | NO | NO | NO |
| HOUSING | yes | NO | NO | NO |

Proposition 63, or the MHSA, is not specific regarding what the reports are to include. These reports to the BOS are due in December for each year but have been routinely submitted late, or, in some cases, not submitted at all. Reports for 2017, 2019 and 2021 were not submitted nor was any explanation given as to why. The 2017 report was completed but not submitted to the BOS.

As an advisory board, the MHB is required to comply with the Brown Act as stated on the CALBHBC website. The purpose of California’s Ralph M. Brown Act is to promote transparency and public participation in local government. All meetings of a legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public. Agenda postings and meeting notices have time constraints that are not always followed. Past struggles with holding scheduled meetings due to lack of quorums or other conflicts have resulted in last minute meeting cancellations. This has been partially addressed by reducing the number of MHB members as stated in the By-laws. This establishes a smaller number needed for a quorum. This can be effective as long as the smaller number of members are dedicated and provide adequate community representation.

The CALBHBC website proved to be a valuable resource. Included on the website is a Brown Act guide. The rules for Brown Act cover: “Agenda & Meeting Notification, Documents, Public Comment, Serial Meetings, Standing Committees, Teleconferences”. The MHB hasn’t consistently followed all the guidelines. While they have posted agendas to their building, Agenda Packets and minutes with voting results are not consistently posted. Those that do get posted are not conveniently located for residents.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses within 60 days from elected county official(s), and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

After conducting interviews and reviewing reference documents, the Grand Jury findings and recommendations are as follows:

F1. Because of the varying levels of grant writing skill and the varying degrees of management staff experience, some grant opportunities are lost.

R1. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors create a County grant writing committee, consisting of cross-departmental representation, by January 1, 2024, to provide assistance to HHS staff charged with writing grants.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Director of Health and Human Services

F2. The Mental Health Advisory Board has not been able to operate optimally, due to difficulties in retaining volunteer personnel.

R2a. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors and the Mental Health Advisory Board develop a strategic Mental Health Advisory Board member recruiting, retention, and succession plan by December 1, 2023.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Mental Health Advisory Board

R2b. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors determine what metrics are needed to evaluate mental health program effectiveness, no later than January 1, 2024.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Mental Health Advisory Board

R2c. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct

the Mental Health Advisory Board to provide these results in a consistent format, beginning with the 2023 annual report, which is due no later than December 31, 2023.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Mental Health Advisory Board

F3. County residents are not fully informed about important mental health updates because the Mental Health Advisory Board does not comply with all guidelines set by the California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards & Commissions in their Best Practices document.

R3. The Calaveras County Grand Jury recommends the Mental Health Advisory Board consistently keep their website up to date with meeting information and records as set by the California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards & Commissions by November 1, 2023.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

Invited Responses

- Mental Health Advisory Board

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| Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury. |
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REFERENCE SOURCES

- 2007-2008 San Joaquin County Grand Jury Report and responses
<https://www.sjcourts.org/divisions/civil-grand-jury/#/2007/reports>
- Brown Act AB-2257
<https://openstates.org/ca/bills/20152016/AB2257/>
- Calaveras County 2022-2023 Budget
<https://administration.calaverasgov.us/Budgets>
- California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions
https://www.calbhbc.org/uploads/5/8/5/3/58536227/best_practices_2023.pdf

- Community Mental Health Services Block Grant
<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/MHBG.aspx>
- <https://mentalhealth.calaverasgov.us/Portals/MentalHealth/Documents/MHSA/FinalDraftMHSAThreeYearFY2020-2023b.pdf>
- Prop 63
<https://mhsoac.ca.gov/the-act-mhsa/>
- The Valley Springs News, March 1, 2023, p. 1
<http://www.thevsn.net/>