

COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS MEET THE TRANSPARENCY TEST

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A new report from the state's Little Hoover Commission may give Californians reasons to be disappointed but a lack of data that shows the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) have improved the lives of Californians is not one of them. Volumes of publicly available data show that MHSA dollars have reduced homelessness, incarceration, and emergency room use by people with severe mental illness. The tragedy in this report is that its errors and flawed conclusions will be used as an excuse to grow bureaucracy instead of improving people's lives.

Counties provide the State with data as required by law that shows that people with severe mental health issues are being well served. Glaringly absent from the Little Hoover Commission report is any reference to the MHSOAC website that provides data about the success of Full Service Partnerships (FSPs). Representing 40% of the MHSA funds, FSP programs do "whatever it takes" to help people with the most severe mental illness succeed, by bringing together a full range of services – from housing to medical care to social services. These programs have resulted in a 58% reduction in homelessness, 39% reduction in hospitalizations, and 47% decrease in incarcerations among participants.

The success of FSPs are even more incredible because they target the hardest to serve; those who have fallen through the safety net for years or decades.

County data also shows that mental health services are meeting an equally important goal of the voter-approved Prop. 63: preventing more Californians from reaching the crisis point of homelessness, incarceration, or emergency mental health treatment. Prevention and Early Intervention efforts reduce the severity of mental illness and social, behavioral, and emotional consequences.

The publically available information on the State's website (<http://www.mhsoac.ca.gov/Evaluations/default.aspx>) also demonstrates the savings taxpayers realize as a result of the MHSA. When offsets for criminal justice and medical care are calculated, FSP programs return almost 100% of their costs.

In Alameda County, people in FSPs for a year experienced a 27% decline in homelessness, 34% in incarceration, and 24% in hospitalizations.

The Mental Health Services Act obligates counties to design and implement mental health services that meet their unique needs. It also requires public input before any plan is adopted. County Boards of Supervisors must approve the spending plans and performance

data is required to both local and state authorities. This responsibility includes an unprecedented level of accountability.

While the Little Hoover Commission report has muddied the discussion about the effectiveness of the MHSA, the facts clearly show that the voter's intent is being honored, the money is being spent as intended, and people's lives are improving because of it.