

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force: Behavioral Health Committee

Meeting Summary for February 15, 2022

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1. Call to Order

Committee Chair Dan Hammill called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M. The meeting was held via remote-only Zoom Webinar.

Members Present: Chris Cochran, Doug Chadwick, Brian Estes, Arlene Feld, Stephen Gockley, Dan Hammill, Mike Hilley, Perry Mowery, Mike Parker, Michael G. Smith, Courtney Taylor, Brien Thane

Members Absent: Nathan Bajema, Seth Fleetwood, Heather Flaherty, Rhyan Lopez, Donnell Tanksley

2. [Recovery Navigator Program \(00:54\)](#)

Mowery gave an overview of how the Recovery Navigator Program was established and the guidelines for the program laid out by legislation. He explained that the Recovery Navigator Program will be imbedded within the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. The program is focused on outreach and referral. Staff will provide community referrals and short-term assistance.

Parker asked if a recovery navigator would be limited to serving people who have committed an infraction, as is the case with LEAD, or if they can engage with others within the community. Mowery said that they can respond to anyone in the community and that they will be Substance Use Disorder (SUD) professionals, unlike LEAD staff. He went on to say that the program is voluntary and the individuals being served have to be open to it.

Parker asked if there was future opportunity for peer navigators to be integrated into this. Mowery said that that would make a lot of sense and that individuals with less formal education need to be paired with strong leadership in order to support them in the high stress situations they face.

Estes asked Mowery to clarify where each of the programs mentioned are located organizationally speaking. Mowery replied that the Ground-Level Response and Coordinated Engagement program (GRACE) has been administered through a contract with Sea Mar up until this point, but will be moving to County administration under a new division in the Health Department. He added that LEAD is housed under the Prosecutor's office through a grant and will also be moving to County administration. The Recovery Navigator Program will be imbedded into the LEAD program.

Feld said that this program was a very big step in behavioral health care. She expressed that this program made her hopeful and emphasized the impact it will have. She asked what the background is of the head of the new Health Department division, Malora Christensen. Mowery responded that she was the manager for GRACE and was a housing manager before that.

Feld asked what "response systems" would mean in real terms. Mowery said that it has not been finalized yet, but would likely include GRACE, LEAD, mental health court, the recovery navigator program, an alternative response team, and possibly co-responder staff.

Parker asked how the task force might evaluate the effectiveness of the new division and its programs are and how gaps may be found and filled. Mowery said that he is in support of data driven decision

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making and suggested that Malora Christensen should be participating in the Task Force on some level. He said that Christensen will be a good resource for data and she will be working on ways to gather needed data about the new division.

Estes echoed the need for evaluation and data analysis. He suggested that it would be beneficial to look at how similar programs are evaluated across the country and that a contractor would likely be needed.

Hilley said that they should think about developing a community information hub to concentrate all the data from various departments and organizations. He added that the most challenging part of this will be obtaining data sharing agreements from all involved.

3. [Public Health, Safety, and Justice Needs Assessment \(30:25\)](#)

Hammill, Parker, and Gockley explained that the Committee has years of experience gathering knowledge about behavioral health topics. Many of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) members may benefit from being able to join the committee meetings as guests in order to build their knowledge and bring it back to their work on the SAC.

Hammill said he has concerns about compressing eight years of information from the committee and passing that content on to the SAC members. He said that the best way they have been able to come up with to do this so far is to have the SAC members be able to interact with the committee by joining meetings rather than watching previous recordings. He emphasized that he is very concerned with public safety and the issues stemming from the degradation of the jail facility.

Taylor shared that she is seeing a disagreement in the community about where taxpayer money should be going. She said that the changes would need to be larger than a new facility and that she is supportive of more behavioral health specialists in the jail. Hammill agreed that it was about more than just a facility and described programming and staff he feels are important.

Gockley added that jail planning should be the smaller part of the work of the SAC and that service development should be the larger part, which will require education for the SAC members and where the work of Behavioral Health Committee's collective knowledge could be useful. He spoke further about the interplay between behavioral health and law enforcement.

Chadwick agreed that there is a lack of behavioral health services in the community and it is a source of frustration with law enforcement. He said that he has seen a shift in attitudes and an acknowledgement that law enforcement and behavioral health services have a symbiotic relationship. He added that a new facility is an important component of behavioral health so that there is space for those programs.

Feld said that her support for a new jail is dependent on a robust mental health and social service system. She went on to say that it is crucial that this facility include the services that our County needs.

Mowery spoke about intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for joining programs and the impact on recidivism the programs have.

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Smith stressed the importance of having a facility that offers a wide range of services. He said there can be a mindset with incarcerated people that service providers are part of the system, akin to correctional officers, and it can be seen as taboo for incarcerated individuals to interact with those staff members. He asked how many peer staff were being utilized and added that peers who are in the jail with those receiving services would be more effective. Taylor responded that with some of her clients, she sees the opposite effect. Some of her clients see their cell mates getting services and want that for themselves. She said that there are a variety of situations and attitudes among incarcerated people.

4. [Update the Sequential Intercept \(1:00:50\)](#)

Hammill went over the sequential intercept model and showed committee members how the programs and services are organized within the model. He said that Whatcom is far ahead of many counties in terms of services offered, but there is still work to do. He read out the programs that are in place but have resource shortages.

Chadwick gave an update on the jail Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT) program, saying that it has expanded significantly in the last month due to a new physician being on board.

Parker explained the housing lab program and advocated for including that or something more robust in the new facility.

Taylor said that mental health court was operating normally in a mainly virtual environment. She added that they would only be doing one trial per week in Superior Court.

Hammill continued with the intercept model document, reading out the programs that are needed but not yet in existence.

Parker said that the intercept model demonstrates that the jail is only one piece in the larger context of support services. He asked if the committee members thought this framework would be a good example to bring to the SAC members and larger community. Feld suggested that the intercept model was too overwhelming and that it would need to be simpler and clearer in order for the majority of people to understand. Taylor agreed that the intercept model is not accessible to everybody and that community members will disengage when faced with this level of data. She said that it would be helpful for the information to be reframed so that it is accessible to the people who are actually interacting with the various intercepts. Estes added that portions of that chart could be useful to certain voters, but agreed that it needed to be simplified for most voters.

5. [Items for March Joint meeting with Legal & Justice Systems Committee \(1:23:40\)](#)

Ideas suggested for discussion at the upcoming joint meeting included:

- Outpatient restoration services
- Chief Wendy Jones presenting on the current situation with Western State and prevalence of mental illness in the jail.
- Inviting SAC members to the meeting

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6. Other Business (1:30:06)

Hammill said that he is meeting with Congressman Rick Larsen about Medicaid reimbursement and increasing capacity of 16-bed facilities. Parker and Hammill asked Chadwick to pass on the committee's support for the Sheriff's officers recently wounded in the line of duty.

7. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:33 A.M.