

Los Angeles County BHSA Community Planning Process
Community Planning Team: Data Equity Concerns and Recommendations

DATA EQUITY FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Any effective behavioral health continuum of care requires a data system that supports continuous program and system improvement, accountability, and planning. This entails collecting accurate and culturally relevant information, identifying disparities and unmet needs for different populations, and providing information to decisionmakers about practices, programs, and policies to achieve better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities, especially those that have historically been overlooked or marginalized. BHSA CPT members raised important data equity issues during the BHSA Community Planning Process, issues that are central to building a data system with the capacity to support achieving equitable outcomes for diverse populations across Los Angeles County.

1. DATA CATEGORIES

- a. Missing Categories: Some communities are not fully represented in current data systems. Important information is not collected because the available categories do not reflect the diversity of people living in Los Angeles County. Data categories should be detailed enough to capture the unique identities and experiences of different communities.
- b. Incorrect Categories: Some groups are combined into larger categories that do not accurately reflect their culture, ancestry, or experiences. For example, some Middle Eastern and North African communities may be grouped into categories that do not represent how they identify themselves. People want categories that better reflect who they are.
- c. Limited Categories for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (SOGI): Many data systems only allow people to identify as male or female. This considerably excludes and renders invisible people whose sexual orientation and gender identities extend beyond a binary system.
- d. Stigmatizing Labels: Some labels can make people feel judged, invisible, or misunderstood (e.g., 'homeless'). Communities should be involved in choosing language that is respectful, accurate, and culturally appropriate.

2. DATA ACCURACY

- a. Small Population Groups: Some communities have relatively small populations, making it harder to collect large amounts of data. However, a smaller population does not mean a community has fewer needs. Data should help determine whether these groups are receiving appropriate services and support.
- b. Self-Reported Information: People may not always understand the questions they are asked. Language barriers, literacy levels, and cultural differences can affect how questions are interpreted. Questions should be clear, easy to understand, and culturally relevant.
- c. Interpreting Data: It is often unclear how data are analyzed and interpreted. Community members should help review and validate findings to ensure that conclusions accurately reflect their experiences and cultural perspectives. Data should be examined through both statistical and cultural lenses.

3. ACCESS TO DATA AND USE OF DATA

- a. Access to Information: Important questions include who can access data, how often it is updated, how quickly it can be shared, and which departments contribute information. The answers may vary depending on the purpose of the data and who will use it. Different audiences may need different types of reports and dashboards.

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- b. Population-Level Results: Data should help county leaders understand community needs and identify disparities between groups at a population level. Information should be available at both countywide and community levels so local needs can be better understood.
- c. Program Performance: Data should help determine which services are provided, who receives them, whether they are effective, and what staffing and resources are needed. This information can help improve programs and reduce disparities.

4. DATA METHODS AND DEFINITIONS

- a. Clear Definitions: Many data terms are difficult to understand. Terms such as incidence, prevalence, utilization, and penetration rate should be explained in plain language. Definitions should also be translated and adapted so they make sense across cultures and languages.
- b. Calculations: People should understand how disparities are measured, who determines the formulas and methods, whether local, state, or federal requirements are being used, and how community differences are considered. Whenever possible, data should be broken down into smaller groups to provide a clearer picture of community needs.
- c. Explaining Methods: The methods used to collect, analyze, and report data should be explained clearly and transparently. When people understand how data are produced, they are more likely to trust the findings.

5. UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT GROUPS

- a. People Receiving Services: Data should show more than who receives services. It should also help answer questions such as when people receive help, whether services are provided before, during, or after a crisis, what services are provided, and what outcomes people experience. Information should be broken down by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, disabilities, age, geography, and other important factors.
- b. People Not Receiving Services: Many people who need help do not seek services because of fear, stigma, immigration concerns, lack of trust, or other barriers. Data should help identify who is not being served, why they are not accessing services, and what changes may be needed to better engage them.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING DATA SYSTEM

It is important for all stakeholders to recognize the following considerations as part of the restructuring of the local data system to advance data equity:

- a. Meaningful data system change takes time and ongoing investment.
- b. Processes for making changes to the data system should be clear and transparent.
- c. Some data categories and methods are controlled by state and federal agencies, while others can be changed locally.
- d. Providers need the staffing, technology, training, and resources necessary to collect data effectively.