



Report on Proposition 63 – The Mental Health Services Act

Summary

As part of its responsibility to oversee public health programs in Mendocino County, the Grand Jury has studied the process, currently underway, through which the County will establish programs and policies in response to the opportunity created by The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA).

Background

In November of 2004, the voters of California approved the MHSA, setting in motion a process of planning and program development that, it is hoped, will lead to significant improvement in mental health services in California. In Mendocino County, the planning process has been underway for several months. In early March the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved the preliminary plan outlining the way in which the County will use the funds from Prop. 63, as the MHSA is generally referred to.

Methodology

In the course of this inquiry, the Grand Jury conducted interviews, attended public meetings, and reviewed documents and publications.

Findings

1. The guidelines and regulations governing the use of MHSA funds call for innovation grounded in the recovery-based model, that is, very much client-oriented and with much group and peer activities.
2. The emphasis in the vision statement of the MHSA (available at http://www.dmh.cahwnet.gov/MHSA/docs/Vision_and_Guiding_Principles_2-16-05.pdf) is for greater client involvement in providing mental health services. Programs funded under Prop. 63 must document that they are client-designed and client-driven.
3. Planning must involve the stakeholders in the broad domain of mental health services in our County: professionals in the County workforce involved with the provision of services for persons with mental illness; those who work in the private or non-profit sector concerned with mental health; and those who volunteer their time and money to mental health issues.
4. The planning process in Mendocino County uses the following 11 workgroups, open to all in the community, each of which will center on one aspect of the mental health process:



County of Mendocino
Grand Jury

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Children's Services
Client Self-Help Programs
Client's/Family Rights Advocacy
Crisis Services
Jail Diversion
Law Enforcement

Medical Services
Older Adult Services
Supportive and Other Housing
Transition Age Youth
Vocational/Educational Opportunities

5. The Mental Health Board (MHB), which has been involved in the planning process to a degree largely unmatched in other California counties, helped draw up the County's plan before it was approved by the BOS.
6. The State of California has promised (though not delivered) about \$100,000 for our County in the fiscal year 2004-2005, to be used specifically for planning; the County has had to spend much of that amount before its arrival.
7. Beginning in fiscal year 2005-06, increased funding will be available, designated for both Adult and Children Community Services and Support, and Prevention and Early Intervention Programs, as well as for education, training, capital facilities, and technology.
8. The disbursement of funds will be spread out over several years, with Community Services and Support being the first area to receive funding.
9. Prop. 63 funds may not supplant existing budget allocations; all MHSA programs must demonstrate the potential for both significant innovation and improvement over past practices.
10. The planning process thus far has included considerable discussion over the process itself, most of all about the level of representation of different agencies and interests in the planning groups.

Recommendations

1. The Grand Jury recommends that officials, both elected and appointed, do everything possible to establish unity within the interest groups as the planning goes on. (Finding 4, 10)
2. The Grand Jury recommends that individuals and groups with concerns for the MHSA continue to participate in the planning process, most usefully perhaps by joining one of the workgroups. (Finding 3, 4)
3. The Grand Jury recommends that every effort be made to hold meetings of the workgroups at times that facilitate the attendance of the greatest possible number of stakeholders and that those meetings be well publicized. (Finding 3)



4. The Grand Jury recommends specifically that the work schedules of employees in departments with an interest in Prop. 63 be adjusted to allow their participation in the workgroups. (Finding 3, 4)

COMMENT

The Grand Jury welcomes the widely expressed commitment to openness and transparency in the planning process for Prop. 63 and urges that it be carried out to the fullest by all concerned.

The exercise in planning that we in this County are now engaged in presents a welcome opportunity to examine in the broadest possible perspective mental health services in the County. There are difficult choices to be made, and prior experience tells us that any decision made will be questioned. The best place to raise those questions is during the workgroup process rather than after the groups' work is done. Officials and members of the general public who participate in those groups will have much more influence on the final plans.

The guidelines call for an emphasis on new approaches and methods. Innovation for its own sake has limited value, but a study of alternatives to the status quo that is both rigorous and open-minded has great promise. And even if the specific programs initiated as a result of the MHSA accomplish relatively little, an honest and truth-seeking debate across all the boundary lines on the map of mental health services may yield great rewards.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
Mendocino County Sheriff's Department

Response Requested

Director, Department of Mental Health
Mendocino Mental Health Board
Director, Department of Social Services
Director, Public Health Department
Director, Alcohol and Other Drug Programs
Director, Ford Street Project