

California Behavioral Health Task Force Meeting



Quarter 3 (July 2026) Meeting Focus

This meeting explored what it will take to build a behavioral health system that better supports children, youth, and families with significant behavioral health needs through early intervention and the needed level and intensity of services and supports. Achieving that vision requires more than expanding services, it requires coordinating care across systems, intervening early, and designing support around the behavioral health needs and experiences of young people. During the meeting, Behavioral Health Task Force members heard directly from youth about their experiences accessing services, the barriers they continue to face, what helped them navigate the system, and the changes they believe would make the greatest difference.

Core Question: How can BHSA help make access to services available to all youth, regardless of their location and needs?

Throughout the session, a common theme emerged: Youth want access to resources before they are in crisis and those services need to be provided when and where youth, and their families, can access them.

What Was Presented:

DHCS is implementing High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) as an evidence-based practice within Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health.

HFW is a team-based, family centered service for children and youth living with significant mental health or behavioral challenges designed to help youth stay at home with their families/caregivers, in school, and in the community. DHCS is clarifying the coverage of, and implementing a new payment model for, HFW, including service design, fidelity monitoring requirements, and related policies.

See the [Draft HFW Information Notice](#) and [Draft HFW Policy Manual](#) for more details.

Crisis diversion works, and the data proves it.

Santa Cruz County's new youth Crisis Stabilization Unit served 90 youth in its first months open; 86% were safely discharged home.

School-based MOUs with LEAs can significantly expand access without creating new service sites.

Identifying local educational agencies (LEAs) in your county without behavioral health MOUs in place could help pinpoint opportunities to expand reach and strengthen access to services.

Click for the [Full Presentation & Recording](#) 

What Members Surfaced:

In the afternoon session, five young experts with lived experience in the foster care, juvenile justice, and homelessness response systems shared their stories, followed by facilitated discussion among Task Force members and audience participants. The following themes emerged:



Help arrives too late.

Young people are the experts on their own experiences. They knew they needed support long before anyone offered it, and help often came only after incarceration or removal from their home. The solution? Invest earlier, closer to home, and in the whole family.



Relationships are the intervention. Every panelist named a person as their turning point: a social worker, a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a mentor, a sibling, a peer. Fund what sustains those bonds, including consistency through staff turnover.



People do not experience one problem at a time. Designing programs separately for mental health, homelessness, or substance use is a design flaw. Members called for humility, intersectional services, and community-defined practices.



Youth expertise deserves professional standing. Pay young lived-experience experts to design programs alongside staff, and sustain the peer and community wellness centers they rely on.



Responses should restore, not punish. A positive drug test should open the door to resources, not trigger incarceration or child removal.

Ways to Get Involved



DHCS launched California's first unified public-facing tool bringing county behavioral health data, including spending plans and Integrated Plan submissions, into **one place**. Learn more about the resource **here**.



Lunch & Learn **Recording** and **Presentation** by DHCS: Behavioral Health Transformation - Goals and Strategies to Support Children, Youth, and Families.



BHSA Community Partner Toolkit:

A guide to understanding and participating in your county's behavioral health planning process.