

Project Brief

Planning for Criminal Justice, Emergency Department and EMS Diversion through Behavioral Health and Social Service Outreach and Stabilization Services

1. Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to outline a planning project being carried out by a team convened by the Whatcom County Health Department, and provide summary background, promising practices research, and a potential avenue for future funding.

2. Project Overview

The County Health Department, the City of Bellingham (COB) and PeaceHealth St Joseph Medical Center (SJMC) are each contributing \$2,500 to support the cost of a three to four month, county-wide visioning process focused on improving services for people who have complex psychosocial needs and are in need of crisis intervention, stabilization, and recovery services.

Many of these individuals have one or more of the following conditions that make their cases complex: Homelessness; psychiatric impairment; chronic medical illness; substance abuse problems, including alcoholism.

Often times, these individuals receive services from multiple agencies and governmental entities resulting in a lack of information exchange, and probable duplication and inefficiencies.

The **purpose** of this project is to develop a set of recommendations to: 1) Increase public safety; 2) reduce excessive use and cost to emergency and criminal justice systems and 3) improve the health and well-being of individuals with complex needs. These recommendations will be aimed at accomplishing the following set of **objectives**:

- ↑ Appropriate and effective use of crisis services and law enforcement
- ↑ Engagement with treatment and supportive services
- ↑ Treatment compliance
- ↑ Effective deployment of limited resources
- ↓ Unnecessary ED Visits
- ↓ Unnecessary EMS Calls
- ↓ Law Enforcement Contacts
- ↓ Jail Bookings
- ↓ Jail Days

Project Team

- Anne Deacon, Manager
Whatcom County Human Services
- Greg Winter, Executive Director
Opportunity Council
- Dan Hamill, Council Member
Bellingham City Council
- Chris Phillips, Dir Community Affairs
PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center
- Tara Sundin, Manager
COB Community & Economic Development
- Mark Gardner, Policy Analyst
City of Bellingham
- Carol Gipson, Executive Director
WAHA

Coordinated by a cross organizational project team, the planning process will be facilitated by Timothy Corey, Colibri Facilitation (Attachment 1). The Scope of Work between the Whatcom County Health Department and the facilitator (Attachment 2) outlines the process in detail. The primary project deliverables include:

- A map that outlines current services and how a number of interacting systems work
- Identification of gaps in services and problem areas
- Review of model programs in other communities that can inform this work
- Recommendations and next steps for policy and decision makers.

The above deliverables with an executive summary will be made available to the three funding organizations and the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force.

3. Background

Whatcom County: In collaboration with human service providers, the Whatcom County Health Department develops, implements and administers community programs that build an infrastructure of supportive services for vulnerable residents. The Health Department funds these efforts with local monies, leveraging regional, state and federal dollars as opportunities arise. The North Sound Behavioral Health Organization (BHO) administers Medicaid-funded behavioral health services in the five-county region, working collaboratively with the Health Department to optimize systems of care. The majority of crisis services are funded by the BHO.

The *Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force* was created by Whatcom County in March of 2016 with a charge to recommend a continuum of new or enhanced programs to divert from or prevent incarceration of individuals with mental illness or substance abuse disorders. The Task Force recently produced a well-received report with the recommendation that the County in collaboration with the BHO and area service providers develop two adjacent 16 bed units, one for acute detox and the other for mental health stabilization services. These two units would create an expanded and enhanced Crisis Triage facility, certified by the state and able to serve as a diversion from the criminal justice system as well as more costly hospital services.

The City of Bellingham: The City jointly developed and funds the following programs that are designed to reduce unnecessary utilization of crisis services and better serve the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness: Community Paramedic Program; WAHA Intensive Case Management Program; Opportunity Council Homeless Outreach Team (HOT).

PeaceHealth St Joseph Medical Center: PeaceHealth operates a fully staffed Level 2 Trauma Emergency Department that includes a 6-bed behavioral health observation area and a 20-bed inpatient behavioral health unit that accommodates involuntary hospitalizations. Additionally, PeaceHealth hosts two *Community Connectors* in the emergency department in collaboration with Unity Care NW and Sea Mar Community Health Centers. Focused on avoiding unnecessary utilization of ED and hospital services by high utilizing more complex patients, the Community Connectors link ED and primary care providers.

Project Brief

Planning for Criminal Justice, Emergency Department and EMS Diversion through Behavioral Health and Social Service Outreach and Stabilization Services

4. Promising Practices

The City Senior Policy and Legislative Analyst conducted a thorough review (Attachment 3) of regional promising practices focusing on the following programs:

- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs
- Chronic Utilizer Alternative Response Team (CHART) - Everett
- Behavioral Health Unit - Portland
- Response Planning De-escalation and Referral (RADAR) - Shoreline
- Hot Spotter Program - Spokane

Quoting from the review:

These programs all work with relatively similar populations: non-violent offenders and/or those with persistent behavioral issues that manifest in the public realm. Consistent with public safety, such programs seek to solve behavioral health issues, reduce overuse of system resources, or divert or otherwise address certain low-level crimes. If the intent of such programs are met, individuals should be shifted from jail, emergency services, and the justice system and toward services such as housing, mental health and drug treatment.

Over time, such programs should also reduce incarceration and the need to treat mental health issues in jail, freeing up resources for other services. Similarly, they should allow the justice system to shift its focus toward processing more serious crimes.

5. Potential Funding Opportunity

Accountable Communities of Health work with the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) to align resources and activities which will improve whole person health and wellness. ACH participants promote health equity in their respective communities and address the broader issues that affect health through regional health improvement plans.

The North Sound Accountable Community of Health is the ACH formed to serve the five-county North Sound region and will, over the next several months, be considering Medicaid waiver project proposals. Care coordination for high risk Medicaid populations is one of the project areas being required by the HCA, and thus Medicaid waiver funds could serve as an avenue for funding some of the recommendations that will be developed as a result of above outlined planning process.

Project Brief

Planning for Criminal Justice, Emergency Department and EMS Diversion through Behavioral Health and Social Service Outreach and Stabilization Services