



Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) – Innovation Project Brief

Project: Recovery Connection Drop-In Center

Proposed by: Voices of Recovery San Mateo County

Total Amount Requested: \$2,840,000 (\$2.275M services, \$340K BHRS admin, \$225K eval)

Duration of Project: 5 years (4 years of services, 6 mths start-up, 6 mths post eval)

Background

San Mateo County's MHSA Three-Year Plan prioritized strategies to provide integrated treatment and recovery supports for individuals living with mental health and substance use challenges. The proposed project was identified as a priority to address the need.

The Challenge

A report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that nationally, approximately half of the individuals who develop substance use challenges are also diagnosed with mental health challenges, and vice versa, and around one in four individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) also have a substance use disorder (SUD).¹ In San Mateo County, substance use challenges accelerated during the pandemic: the County reported a 430% increase in overdose-related referrals to the County Health's Medication Assisted Treatment outreach/response team and a 21% increase in treatment of Opioid Use Disorder in the SMC Medical Center's Emergency Department since March 2020.² Furthermore, the County's 2019 Community & Health Needs Assessment found that a full 47% of adults reported that they would not know how to access treatment for substance use disorders.³ Thus, there is a need to more effectively reach individuals with substance use and/or mental health challenges.

The Proposed Project

The proposed project is a culturally responsive "Recovery Connection" one-stop center for individuals with substance use challenges or co-occurring substance use and mental health challenges at all stages of recovery. The Recovery Connection will 1) use a peer support model where individuals receive free services and supports from peers with lived experience; 2) center around Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) programming to help individuals acquire tools and confidence to begin, maintain, and enhance their recovery; 3) provide linkages to more intensive behavioral health services as needed; and 4) serve as a training center to expand capacity countywide to use WRAP with individuals with substance use challenges or co-occurring substance use and mental health challenges.

Services

The Recovery Connection will offer the following peer-based services in English and Spanish:

- Evidence-based Wellness and Action Recovery Plan (WRAP) workshops
- Peer mentoring and coaching
- Job readiness and employment referral services
- Health and wellness classes
- Referrals and connection to resources including housing, education, job training, and outside behavioral health services as needed
- Rewarding volunteer opportunities
- WRAP training for peers, clinical providers, and paraprofessionals

¹ NIDA. 2022, September 27. [Part 1: The Connection Between Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illness.](#)

² "San Mateo County Health Alert Highlights Pandemic's Impact on Mental Health and Substance Use." January 8, 2021.

³ [Community Health & Needs Assessment 2019](#), San Mateo County: Major Findings.





Target Population

The Recovery Connection drop-in center will be based in a centrally located, easily accessible location in East Palo Alto or Belmont in San Mateo County and will be open to adults with substance use challenges or co-occurring substance use and mental health challenges in any of the five stages of recovery, from pre-contemplative to maintenance and enhancement. This includes individuals who may have undiagnosed mental health conditions. The project will specifically seek to reach individuals in the Latinx community, particularly immigrants whose second language is English and are very low- to low-income, predominantly male, and underemployed or unemployed and may be justice-involved. The program will also seek to reach other historically underserved populations, including Asian/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, low-income, LGBTQIA+, houseless, chronically unemployed, and justice-involved populations. The project will serve an estimated 940 – 1100 participants each year through weekly WRAP groups and health and wellness groups.

The Innovation

- **MHSA Innovative Project Category:** Makes a change to an existing behavioral health practice
- **MHSA Primary Purpose:** Increases access to behavioral health services to underserved groups

A long-term analysis of participants in Recovery Community Centers (RCCs) observed improvements in duration of abstinence, substance problems, psychological well-being, and quality of life.⁴ Recovery Cafes, such as those in Seattle, have shown positive outcomes resulting from sober social events; opportunities to give back through volunteerism and chores; feelings of connectedness; and feeling safe and welcomed.⁵ The proposed Recovery Connection center has a similar vision and model to the RCC/Recovery Café model; however, there are significant differences in approach and execution: 1) the Recovery Connection will welcome all who come to the center whether or not they are clean and sober, as long as their substance use does not result in disruptive behavior and unsafe space, whereas the Recovery Café model tends to require people to be sober for 24 hours before entering; 2) Participants will not have to meet participation or membership requirements to come to the Recovery Connection, whereas the Recovery Café model has membership requirements; 3) WRAP will be a key foundation of the Recovery Connection center; 4) The Recovery Connection will provide access to all adults in the recovery community, whereas other recovery cafes tend to focus on houseless individuals; and 5) The Recovery Connection will serve as a training center for professionals and paraprofessionals to expand capacity countywide to use WRAP.

Learning Goals

Through an independent evaluation, this project seeks to learn:

1. Does a drop-in recovery center **increase access** to recovery services and mental health services and supports for individuals who were not previously engaged in services?
2. What changes do individuals who participate in WRAP and other drop-in recovery center services experience in their **long-term recovery**, including recovery time, mental wellness indicators, and economic mobility?
3. Does training peer workers, clinicians, and paraprofessionals in WRAP **increase capacity** in San Mateo County to use WRAP with individuals with substance use and mental health challenges?

⁴ Kelly JF, Fallah-Sohy N, Cristello J, Stout RL, Jason LA, Hoepfner BB. Recovery community centers: Characteristics of new attendees and longitudinal investigation of the predictors and effects of participation. *J Subst Abuse Treat.* 2021 May;124:108287. doi: 10.1016/j.jsat.2021.108287. Epub 2021 Jan 13. PMID: 33771284; PMCID: PMC8004554.

⁵ Mandy D. Owens, Caleb J. Banta-Green, Alison Newman, Rachel Marren & Ruby Takushi (2022) Insights into a Recovery Community Center Model: Results from Qualitative Interviews with Staff and Member Facilitators from Recovery Cafe in Seattle, Washington, *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, DOI: [10.1080/07347324.2022.2088323](https://doi.org/10.1080/07347324.2022.2088323)

