



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" drop-in center for individuals at all stages of recovery. The Recovery Connection will use a peer support model where individuals receive free services and supports from peers with lived experience. The Recovery Connection will help individuals with substance use and/or mental health challenges acquire tools and confidence to begin, maintain, and enhance their recovery; reduce drug and alcohol relapse; build a strong and positive social network; increase self-awareness; hold themselves accountable for their substance use; reduce anxiety, stress, and depression; and increase their sense of hope and purpose.

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

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 all adults 18+ with substance use and/or mental health challenges. The Recovery Connection will outreach to and welcome individuals in any of the five stages of recovery, including people who have not yet committed to their recovery, individuals early in recovery, individuals returning from residential treatment, sober living home residents, and individuals who have been in recovery for many years and are working to prevent relapse. The project will specifically seek to reach Latinx individuals, who make up nearly half of current Voices of Recovery San Mateo County (VORSMC) participants, as well as 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 unique participants each year.

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

Recovery Cafes, such as those in San Jose and Seattle, have shown positive outcomes resulting from sober social events; opportunities to give back through volunteerism and chores; feelings of connectedness; and having a warm physical space where people feel safe and welcomed.⁴ The Recovery Connection will provide similar recovery services to Recovery Cafe San Jose and Recovery Cafe Seattle⁵ but, with significant program and approach differences. The Recovery Connection culture will be free of judgement and will meet participants where they are in their recovery journey. Importantly, it will give participants choices in programs and services and help them understand those choices so they can take personal responsibility for their actions and investment in their own recovery on their own timeline. The holistic approach will be as follows: 1) WRAP will be a key foundation of the Recovery Connection center; 2) The Recovery Connection will welcome all who come to the center, whether or not they are clean and sober, whereas Recovery Cafes in San Jose and Seattle require people to be sober for 24 hours before participating in programs; 3) Participants will not have to meet any participation or membership requirements to come to the Recovery Connection, whereas Recovery Cafes in San Jose and Seattle have membership requirements; 4) The Recovery Connection will employ a peer support model; 5) The Recovery Connection will provide access to all people in the community age 18+ with substance use and/or mental health challenges, whereas other recovery cafes tend to focus on houseless individuals; and 6) 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 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, number of relapses, and economic mobility?
3. Does training professionals and paraprofessionals in WRAP **increase capacity** in San Mateo County to use WRAP with individuals with substance use and mental health challenges?

⁴ 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)

⁵ <https://recoverycafesj.org/history/>; <https://recoverycafe.org/>

