



# DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER



Dr. Jai Africa

It is a difficult time we are currently in, as the changing federal landscape presents challenges to providing services for vulnerable communities. State and federal actions are expected to bring changes to Medi-Cal and other safety net programs in the coming months, with additional proposed changes rolling out over the next several years. Despite this, San Mateo County Health and BHRS continue to provide services and remain committed to our mission of enhancing the lives of those affected by mental health and/or substance use challenges. Many staff and community members have questions about how these changes may impact our work and service delivery. While the details of how these policies will be implemented are still unclear, we are monitoring the situation to assess the impacts on our clients, services and staff and will share updates as we learn more.

So far, we understand that the upcoming Medi-Cal changes will particularly impact members with unsatisfactory immigration status (UIS), a term that designates individuals who do not have a valid or satisfactory immigration status according to U.S. immigration laws, but who may still be eligible for certain Medi-Cal benefits. There will be a freeze in enrollment, dental coverage will no longer be provided, and there will be new premiums, decreasing access to insurance and making it harder to stay on Medi-Cal. As part of H.R. 1, the Big Beautiful Bill, up to 3.4 million Medi-Cal members may lose coverage. Despite the uncertainty, we continue to adapt and celebrate the amazing things happening at BHRS. For example, this issue includes community partners expanding their substance use services, free Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills groups for the community, and a new, innovative program that coordinates pet fostering while clients enter in-patient care. San Mateo County remains dedicated to caring for all residents, regardless of immigration status and is committed to its designation as a Certified Welcoming County. We encourage residents to continue to seek the care and services they need.

## Horizon Palm Avenue & Our Common Ground Detox Certification Expands Continuum of Care Services

Horizon Services' Palm Avenue Detox and Our Common Ground (OCG) Detox offer residential withdrawal management services to San Mateo County Medi-Cal beneficiaries under the county's Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (ODS), Continuum of Care. These services provide a safe and supportive homelike environment for individuals experiencing acute intoxication or withdrawal symptoms, assisting with symptom management and providing referrals to community recovery services.

## Horizon Palm Avenue & Our Common Ground Detox Certification Expands Continuum of Care Services

Since July 2019, Palm Avenue Detox, a 22-bed facility in San Mateo, has provided safe withdrawal management services in a medically supervised environment. As of November 1, 2024, OCG also provides these services for males only in a 6-bed setting. Both Palm Avenue and OCG offer 24/7 services, staffed by certified substance use disorder (SUD) counselors, licensed vocational nurse's, licensed professionals of the healing arts, and medical doctors. These urgent, medically necessary services protect life, prevent significant illness or disability and alleviate pain.



From left to right in front of Palm Avenue Detox, Jackie Mathiesen, SUD Supervisor, Jessica Stafford, Liscenced Vocational Nurse, Ashley Pacini, Dayshift SUD Lead, and Michael Marinsik, SUD Counselor and primary Group Facilitator.

As of January 2025, Our Common Ground and Palm Avenue are approved by the Department of Health Care Services to provide Incidental Medical Services (IMS). These services, delivered by or under a health care practitioner, address medical concerns during detoxification and enhance client monitoring in withdrawal and residential treatment. IMS includes:

- Obtaining medical histories
- Monitoring health status
- Testing associated with detoxification from alcohol or drugs
- Providing alcoholism or drug abuse recovery or treatment services
- Overseeing patient self-administered medications
- Treating substance abuse disorders, including detoxification.

The average length of stay in a detox withdrawal management facility is 3 to 5 days, and more than 85% of clients complete detox and are linked to other services.

For information/questions about Horizon Palm Avenue or Our Common Ground, please contact BHRS Analyst, Alberto Ramos at [alramos@smcgov.org](mailto:alramos@smcgov.org), or (650) 207-3841.

**By Sheryl Uyan, MSW**, Health Services Manager II, BHRS Alcohol and Other Drugs

## Partnering for Resilience: The Case of Dialectical Behavior Therapy Groups at Children's Health Council Ravenswood

Children's Health Council Ravenswood is built on the foundation of partnership and trust. Founded in 2014 by Children's Health Council (CHC), CHC Ravenswood expands youth mental health and learning services to the communities of East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park.

A pivotal milestone in CHC Ravenswood's growth was the opening of its in-person clinic in the heart of the East Palo Alto community. The clinic offers individual, family and group therapy for Ravenswood youth referred by schools and community partners. It also serves as a hub for the Ravenswood Wellness Partnership (RWP) Training Consortium, which is building a pipeline of bilingual, bicultural therapists attuned to the community's needs.

With a growing waitlist of families interested in individual or family therapy, CHC Ravenswood recently launched free Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Skills Groups for children, teens, and parents. DBT is an evidence-based therapy that helps people build real-life skills to manage emotions, strengthen relationships, and handle stress in healthier ways. It focuses on practical skills like mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Building on CHC's success with DBT at other sites, the Ravenswood team wanted to make this effective model accessible for the community's diverse, multicultural population. The groups also provided timely support for families waiting to begin individual therapy. Thanks to funding from the San Mateo County Contractors' Association/BHRS Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Grant Award and The Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI), the CHC Ravenswood team completed hours of rigorous DBT trainings and launched DBT Skills Groups for youth and parents in Spring 2024. Parents were offered DBT training concurrently, so that children and parents were trained in similar skills, including paced breathing, mindfulness, and emotion identification.

To date, CHC Ravenswood has offered four 8-week sessions of no-cost DBT Skills Groups (three in Spanish), serving 12 youth and 11 caregivers referred through the Ravenswood Wellness Partnership. Clients report stronger family relationships, reduced mental health challenges, and increased use of mindfulness and coping skills.

Strong community partnerships have bolstered the success of these groups. These partnerships with local schools, Ravenswood Family Health Center, and nonprofits such as Boys and Girls Club promote timely referrals, improved coordination of client care, and training opportunities for psychology trainees who assist in co-leading the groups. With the support of local partners, CHC Ravenswood remains committed to listening deeply, responding with expert care, and advancing youth wellness and resilience in the community.

**By Zahra Murtaza, PhD**, Clinical Program Manager, Children's Health Council



## Fostering Wellness Program

San Mateo County BHRS and Public Health Policy and Planning (PHPP) are seeking volunteers for The Fostering Wellness Program. This initiative, supported by a 3-year Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation (INN) component grant, aids individuals facing mental health or substance use issues by providing temporary foster care for their pets through volunteer foster homes and dog walkers. This service allows pet owners to seek necessary treatment without worrying about their pets' well-being. Volunteers typically care for pets, particularly dogs and cats, for 30 to 90 days. The program ensures confidentiality, offers training, conducts home inspections, and covers all food and veterinary costs. Volunteers provide a safe, loving environment. Interested animal lovers can contact [FosteringWellness@smcgov.org](mailto:FosteringWellness@smcgov.org) for more information.



**FOSTER HOMES NEEDED**

Foster a pet for a Behavioral Health client entering in-patient care and help keep their animal family member safe and loved.

**DOG WALKERS ALSO WELCOME !**

We provide the food and vet care, you provide the love!

**For more information email:**  
**FOSTERINGWELLNESS@SMCGOV.ORG**

 **SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH**

## San Mateo County Overdose Prevention Coalition Meet & Greets

The San Mateo County Overdose Prevention Coalition will be hosting a series of Meet and Greet Socials weekly during the month of September (Recovery Month) as a kickoff for our 1<sup>st</sup> General Membership Meeting of the SMC Overdose Prevention Coalition in October. The Meet & Greets are an opportunity for new members to connect with coalition partners and staff, learn about the work of our action teams, and identify ways to get involved to help ensure a county-wide, strategic, coordinated response to end overdoses in our county.

- **September 9**, 9:30-10:30am at allcove San Mateo, 2600 S El Camino Real, Suite 300, San Mateo.
- **September 16**, 9:30-10:30am in the lobby at SamTrans, 1250 San Carlos Ave., San Carlos.
- **September 23**, 2:30-3:30pm in the Atrium Room at 2000 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo.

The Meet & Greets are drop-ins, no RSVP needed. Free coffee and snacks will be available!

