



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER



Dr. Jai Africa

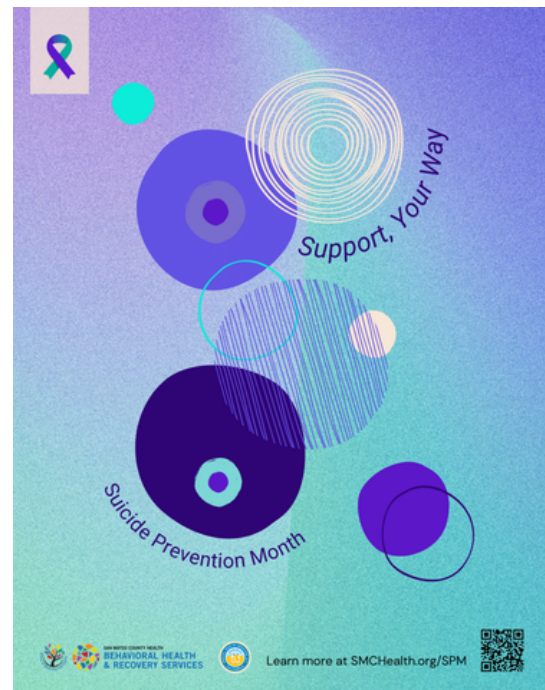
Did you know that in 2024, 69 people died by suicide in San Mateo County? Or that over 13,000 calls were received by the San Mateo County Crisis Line? These numbers emphasize the importance of community support and accessible behavioral health resources. Every call has the potential to save a life. This September, we recognize Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month, which provide opportunities to connect with community, create conversation, and learn how to offer support. As always, our goal in BHRS is to reduce stigma and create a safe and welcoming place for everyone, wherever they are on their wellness and recovery journey. Join us at one of the many local events happening. Remember, you are not alone.

September is Suicide Prevention Month

For 2025, San Mateo County and partners are promoting the statewide theme: “Support, Your Way”. This year’s theme is not about prescribing what help should look like. It’s about validating the choice to reach out for help, understanding that support can look different for everyone, and reframing the act of asking for support as taking control—not losing it.

Support, Your Way- Tips and Reminders:

- **Getting help means taking control.** Asking for support isn’t a breakdown. It’s a breakthrough—and it can look like whatever you need it to.
- **Support looks different for everyone.** Some people talk to a peer, text 988, open up to a friend, start therapy, or do a mix of all of these options. There’s no one-size-fits-all. You get to choose what feels safe.
- **You don’t need to wait for a crisis.** Reaching out before things spiral is just as valid as reaching out in an emergency. If you, a family member or a friend is in a mental health crisis, **call the San Mateo County Crisis Line at (650) 579-0350**. If you or they are at risk of harming themselves or others, call 911.
- **There’s no wrong way to ask for help.** Even if you don’t know what to say or if it’s messy.



BHRS’ Office of Diversity & Equity (ODE) and the Suicide Prevention Committee (SPC) hosts free events throughout the month of September to promote Suicide Prevention Month. Visit smchealth.org/SPM for more information.

14th Annual Recovery Happens - Recovery is Real: Restoring Every Aspect of Life

Throughout September, Voices of Recovery and BHRS invite you to honor the strength, creativity, and resilience of our recovery community. Since 1989, National Recovery Month has been held to create space for us all to honor and support the nation's proud and strong recovery community, new evidence-based treatment and recovery practices, and the dedication of service providers and communities who make recovery possible.



This year, Voices of Recovery celebrates our 14th year of Recovery Happens. Join us as we celebrate and reflect through a series of meaningful events that celebrate recovery, raise awareness, and foster connection. Hundreds of people across the county will come together to help reduce the stigma surrounding substance use and mental health challenges and celebrate the accomplishments of those successfully entering recovery and beginning a fulfilling life.

Art Exhibit at the Center of Creativity

All Month Long | Monday–Friday, 11:00am–2:00pm at 800 Main Street, Redwood City

Explore powerful artwork created by individuals in recovery, showcasing personal journeys of healing and hope.

Candlelight Vigil

Friday, September 5, 5:00pm–8:00pm at 400 County Center, Redwood City

Join us for an evening of remembrance and inspiration. Through community testimonies, we will honor lives lost to substance use, support those currently struggling, and celebrate those in recovery.



Philomena Walk of Hope & Proclamation Ceremony

Tuesday, September 9, 7:00am–12:00pm

- **7:00am–9:00am at Mezes Park, 1027 Allerton Street, Redwood City:** Begin the day with breakfast and the Philomena Walk of Hope at Mezes Park. This walk honors the life, story and legacy of Philomena Anderson-Ashford, a proud advocate of recovery whose joy and laughter inspired so many in our community.
- **9:00am–12:00pm at 400 County Center, Redwood City:** Continue the celebration at the Redwood City Courthouse, where the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors will present their Proclamation recognizing September as Recovery Month, followed by a Resource Fair offering support and services for individuals in recovery.

14th Annual Recovery Happens - Recovery is Real: Restoring Every Aspect of Life

Recovery Happens Picnic

Thursday, September 18, 10:00am–2:00pm at Eucalyptus Picnic Area, 1701 Coyote Point Drive, San Mateo

Celebrate recovery in the beautiful outdoors at Coyote Point! Enjoy free food, mindfulness walk, games, activities, and a resource fair—all in support of recovery wellness and community connection.

Recovery Happens Dance

Saturday, September 27, 6:00pm–10:00pm at Friendship Hall, 416 2nd Avenue, San Mateo

The month is concluded with a night of music, dancing, entertainment and celebration! Enjoy pizza, snacks, and entertainment as we honor the recovery journey and count down our collective milestones. Come dressed in your favorite black-and-white attire.

By ShaRon Heath, Executive Director of Voices of Recovery. For more information, visit vorsmc.org, email invor@vorsmc.org or call (650) 980-1922.



Congrats to the BHRS AOD Contract, Performance, & Monitoring Team!

In the last year, the BHRS Alcohol and Other Drugs Contract Performance and Monitoring Team has cleared all Corrective Action Plans (CAP), which address and resolve deficiencies identified during an audit, with the Department of Health Care Services. CAPs addressed some long-standing issues concerning compliance with policies, clinical documentation, funding, data and other regulatory requirements. This tremendous milestone ensures that the County and its contractors are in compliance with the State and have addressed previous outstanding issues. A major component to the team's success has been the LEAP process, which helps align goals and focus on continuous improvement.

Through their continuous participation, team efficiency, provider support, and communication, the team has fostered a healthy and safe collaborative work culture and trust. We aim to leverage quality improvement and continuous learning to align with Behavioral Health Transformation efforts, enhancing substance use disorder treatment capacity, promoting partnerships and integration within our BHRS system, and ensuring high-quality client care.



Thank you to the Contract, Performance and Monitoring team! Top row L to R: Natalia Rojas, Yadhira Christensen, Diana Campos Gomez, Alberto Ramos, Tracey Chan, Isabelle Valderrama. Bottom row L to R: Sheryl Uyan, Ashley Gomez, Melina Cortez, Susan Tablante.

BHRS Transformation: Deepening the Journey

BHRS is continuing its transformation journey—an ambitious and collaborative effort to reshape how behavioral health services are delivered in our community. As we shared back in our June 2025 newsletter, Prop.1 is a current key initiative driving this transformation and has been a catalyst for change across the State. The Executive Team, along with feedback from the BHRS workforce, is defining target outcomes and priorities to guide this transformation. The goal is to establish organization priorities for the next five years, focusing on increasing community trust and promoting continuous growth and adaptability. The final priorities will be shared for input this fall.

What's Up with Prop. 1

To keep community informed and engaged about Prop. 1 specifically, we've launched a **NEW Prop. 1 Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) Transition Website!** This site serves as a central hub for updates, resources, and opportunities to participate in the transformation process. Visitors can stay informed at the “What is Prop.1” tab, provide input at the “How Do I Get Involved?” tab, and learn more from the “Meeting Materials and Presentations” tab. Whether you're a provider, partner or community member, the website is your go-to resource for understanding how Prop. 1 is transforming behavioral health care in San Mateo County.

Prop. 1 Transition Timeline



BHRS is committed to ensuring that the voices of our community, clients, families and partners are at the center of our transformation journey. Get involved by sharing your voice and shaping behavioral health services in San Mateo County. Opportunities include:

- **Transformation Journey Sessions (coming soon!):** Provide your input and learn about our BHRS roadmap, key priorities and outcomes over the next 5-years.
- **Stay Connected:** [Subscribe here](#) for updates to remain informed and engaged.

Together, we're shaping a behavioral health system that reflects the needs, values, and strengths of our San Mateo County community. As we navigate these changes, your participation remains essential.

By Doris Estremera, Mental Health Services Act Manager.