Realizing the Promise of Reforms: An Advocate’s Perspective

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About the National Health Law Program

- NHeLP is a nonprofit law firm that protects and advances the health care rights of low income and underserved individuals and families in California and across the country.

- State and local partnerships with legal aid, disability rights, and health advocates.

- National partners.

- Offices: CA, DC, NC.
Framing the Goal
What is important here?

- State policy reform is an important first step
- Policy reform ≠ meaningful change on-the-ground
- Our goal: Foster youth have access to the behavioral health services and supports that they need
- Real change results from effective implementation of policy reform at every level
How do we ensure effective implementation?
Evaluating County Implementation

- Policy & Procedure Review
- Data Review
- Qualitative Research
NHeLP has reviewed the written policies and procedures of the five counties with the largest foster care populations obtained through Public Record Act (PRA) requests and a review of published materials. Analyzed for compliance with new SMHS access criteria and other important beneficiary protections.
Preliminary Observations:

- Counties have been slow to incorporate the SMHS access criteria into their own policies and procedures
- Beneficiary Handbooks have been outdated

Report Forthcoming
Data Review

- NHeLP has reviewed data related to the usage of SMHS, Intensive Care Coordination (ICC), and Intensive Home Based Services (IHBS) by children and youth in the five counties with the largest foster youth populations.
- Data obtained via two state-run reporting systems or “dashboards,” which are publicly available.
- Service usage by foster youth compared to usage by all youth and to statewide data.
Data Review

- Preliminary Observations:
  - Data types are limited
  - Inter-county data is not available
  - Data is not made available in a timely manner
  - Because the most recent data is from 2021, we cannot currently evaluate differences in SMHS usage before and after the access criteria reform
  - Existing state data dashboards are difficult to navigate and create confusion
- Report Forthcoming
Qualitative Research

- NHeLP has conducted a survey of advocates and providers in the five counties with the largest foster care populations.
- Additionally, we have conducted “secret shopper” calls to the 24/7 Mental Health Access Lines in each of these counties.
- Stakeholder feedback and direct observation of how these systems are functioning provides important contextual detail.
Qualitative Research

• Preliminary Observations:
  • Waitlists for SMHS are common
  • There are not enough providers to meet demand
  • Mental health access lines in some counties are not functioning the way they should

• Report Forthcoming
Conclusion

Heightened oversight of county implementation is needed and should incorporate:

- Regular review of county policies and procedures (more often than triennially)
- Collection and review of additional and more timely data
- Feedback from stakeholders with real-time, lived experience
New Resources for Foster Youth
Foster Youth Resources

- NHeLP, in partnership with the National Center for Youth Law, recently released a suite of infographics aimed at helping foster youth better understand the services available to them through California’s Medicaid program
- Guide to Accessing Medi-Cal Mental Health Services for Current and Former Foster Youth
- Reproductive and Sexual Health Resources for California Foster Youth
Thank you!

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