

LOS GATOS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH REPORT

Prepared by the Community Health and Senior Services Committee (CHSSC)

Commissioner George Rossmann and Commissioner Jeff Blum

February 28, 2023

I Background

During the past several years there has been a significant decline in behavioral health (BH), including mental health (MH) and substance use (SU), throughout our county across all age groups. Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs) by numerous health care providers and the Santa Clara County (SCC) Public Health Department captured that decline. Locally, according to a recent survey of Older Adults in Los Gatos (CASOA) conducted by SASCC, 21% of the respondents reported mental health challenges. Another county survey found that about 30% of residents over age 60 live with depression and 80% said they do not have access to quality mental health care. Mental health issues also affect early adult and middle age residents, the missing middle, who struggle to find therapists. CASSY and ASPIRE have reported a significant increase in depression among Los Gatos students.

II Local Needs Assessment

Service providers and community organizations are doing heroic work every day to support the mental health of youth, adults, and seniors. While different groups address different parts of the problem and implement different solutions, all of them face significant challenges. A number of these groups were interviewed over the past few months to help answer the following basic questions:

- What initiatives should Los Gatos undertake to advance behavioral health in our community?
- How should the town respond to the increasing demand for services across all demographics?
- Are there things the Los Gatos community can do to destigmatize mental health issues?
- What community outreach programs work?

Interviews were held with the following individuals and typically lasted an hour per interview.

Marico Sayoc, Executive Director of CASSY
Joseph Sandoval, Jonathan Cowan, and Lauren Johnson, El Camino Hospital
Jeannie Anderson, Good Samaritan Hospital
Matt Savage and Joe Simitian, Santa Clara County Supervisor's Office
Margaret Obilor and Elania Reis, SCC Behavioral Health Services Department
Vic Ojakian, National Alliance on Mental Illness
Jere King, Children's Health Council
Jason Noriega, Momentum for Mental Health
Anna Nguyen, ACT for Mental Health

In addition to these interviews, an extended discussion with service providers was held at a Los Gatos/Saratoga Service Providers Quarterly Meeting to explore services and resources needed. The SASCC Health Fair 2022, Stop The Stigma, gave us the opportunity to engage with additional providers as they endeavored to respond to questions and concerns raised by attendees.

III Behavioral and Mental Health Ecosystem in Los Gatos, a Service Assessment

After gathering data from the array of sources summarized above, the Commission analyzed the results and determined that Los Gatos, and in fact the entire West Valley, needed to improve access to mental health care. Our current assessment is that there is:

- Insufficient provision of behavioral health services
- Insufficient live therapy sessions, which are important for building trust
- Inadequate supply of licensed clinicians, social workers, and case managers
- Difficult to navigate county service tools and no tools available in Los Gatos
- After school programs, long term counseling, and parent workshops need expansion

IV Summary of Suggestions from Needs Assessment

- Consider ways to make services better known, easier to access, and feel “local” - hubs, fairs, flyers, forums, webinars.
- Find ways to optimize service provider assignment to leverage scarce resources.
- Develop a physical location in town to serve as a mental health resource center. Include a physical setup for telehealth operations.
- Develop programs that teach older adults how to navigate the mental health landscape and select a mental health provider.
- Find ways to structure financial partnerships with mental health service providers.
- Deepen youth and family support programs, programs that educate parents, and those that enable long term counseling.
- Support the development of after school counseling programs such as ASPIRE and allcove.
- Encourage the expansion of respite care and storytelling for seniors.
- Increase collaboration by affiliating with regional entities and jointly sponsoring activities.
- Seek funding from county/state/MHSA sources for pilot programs to advance MH services.
- Expand county MH outreach with an access point or satellite operation in Los Gatos.
- Expansion of outpatient therapy would have a significant impact.
- Facilitate the development of peer-based support groups – widows, drug users, jail moms, etc.

V. Potential Funding Sources and Collaborations

In an October memorandum, SCC Supervisor Simitian requested that the Board of Supervisors develop options for improving access to mental health care in the West Valley. This could include partnering with one of more community organizations and SCC financing of pilot studies through the Mental Health Services Act. The possibility of such a partnership has taken a major step forward recently with the announcement of the county undertaking a feasibility study to bring a Valley Health Center clinic to the De Anza Community College campus in Cupertino.

The El Camino Hospital Foundation expressed an interest in fundraising initiatives and special events that would support mental health programs such as ASPIRE. El Camino offered to present some of these ideas to the CHSSC and town council.

CASSY has expressed an interest in creating a program in Los Gatos similar to the one it developed in Ravenswood with support from donors and developers.

The Los Gatos Senior Services Committee has proposed establishing a 501(c)3 nonprofit to support fundraising for seniors services. A similar approach could be utilized for mental health services.

VI Recommendations

Some of the suggestions can be implemented with little additional cost to the town. Others require investment, but there are means to limit its extent. For example, the Los Gatos Town Council created a Senior Services Committee over a year ago to examine the longer-term needs of its older adult community. It developed a 10-year roadmap for revitalizing senior service in Los Gatos. With support from Santa Clara County, surrounding communities, and engaged service providers, a similar plan could be developed for mental health services in the West Valley. The town should encourage and become actively involved in any effort to develop such a plan. There is already evidence of momentum at the county level.

The CHSSC should take the initiative by creating a subcommittee to prepare a mental health services roadmap. The subcommittee ought to invite expert guests from the County Behavioral Health Services Department and the population of local service providers to contribute. Some key elements of the roadmap will be education, outreach, and service integration. The CHSSC should also assist CASSY in developing a proposal for improved case management of youth mental health services in Los Gatos.

The town ought to actively explore the possibility of a local service network by allocating space for a county satellite operation and providing a facility to support telehealth operations.