

R E M H D C O

Racial & Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition

Response to the Concerns Regarding the \$60 million for the California Reducing Disparities Project

Both the California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA) and the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) have raised concerns regarding the Governor's proposal for the \$60 million set aside for the California Reducing Disparities Project.

It is our understanding that currently, these funds are set-aside in a special trust fund and the Governor's trailer bill language proposes to transfer these funds to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). It is our belief that this is the logical place for these funds to be placed as Governor also proposes that the staff from the Office of Multicultural Services (currently under the Department of Mental Health) will be transferring to a new Office of Health Equity under CDPH.

The staff from the Office of Multicultural Services (OMS) has been in charge of the extensive planning process for this project and has been working collaboratively with the representatives of underserved communities even prior to this project. No other government entity or organization has the expertise, commitment, or trust of the community more than OMS.

A "Dangerous Precedent"

During the March 22, 2012 MHSOAC meeting, the Chair of the MHSOAC and a representative of the California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA) expressed opposition to the Governor's proposal related to the \$60 million set aside on the grounds that the "precedent of amending the Act to set aside local funds for a state-level project of any kind" would be inconsistent with the intent of the Act.

The set aside of the \$60 million does not set a "dangerous precedent" as characterized by some. Attached is a formal document, "Mental Health Services Act Prevention and Early Intervention: County and State Level Policy Direction", that outlines agreements developed by the MHSOAC's PEI Committee regarding policy direction for counties in developing their PEI plans.

The document also includes specific provisions for 4 statewide projects including: Ethnically and Culturally Specific Programs and Interventions. Furthermore, the document provides for *a statewide set-aside for all four statewide projects*.

Page 10 of the document, under the section entitled Ethnically and Culturally Specific Program and Interventions reads:

“Statewide set aside for up to \$15,000,000 per year, up until the implementation of the MHSA Integrated Plan, to support special projects for reducing ethnic disparities based on the results of the Ethnic Stakeholder process. This is in addition to, rather than instead of, expecting Counties to work toward reducing disparities in all County PEI Plans.”

This document was developed and agreed upon by the State Department of Mental Health, the counties, and stakeholders, and adopted by the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission first in 2007 and (again in 2007 with amendments.) The first three PEI Statewide Projects have been launched.

A streamlined, less bureaucratic funding stream

There was a tremendous amount of confusion regarding the funding for the first three statewide PEI projects. We do not believe that administering the funds for the California Reducing Disparities Project should mirror that confusing process. Most representatives of racial and ethnic communities believe the process was overly-bureaucratic, not conducive to participation by these communities, and certainly did not benefit the organizations that primarily serve these communities.

If an organization supports the elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy, it would not support the prior process where funds were sent back and forth from the state to the counties and back to the state again to end up in a new bureaucracy that represents counties. Currently, these other statewide projects are being administered with no oversight with respect to cultural competence or reducing disparities and no organizations primarily serving racial and ethnic communities as major partners.

The California Reducing Disparities Project has generated hope in underserved communities throughout the state more than any other component of the Mental Health Services Act. The Office of Multicultural Services must continue to be its administrator as it is overwhelmingly trusted above all other government offices by underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural communities to administer this project to meet the objectives of actually reducing disparities.