



TO: Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators (PACA)
Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)
Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations (BH-MCOs)
HealthChoices-Behavioral Health Contractors

FROM: Dennis Marion
Deputy Secretary, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

DATE: March 23, 2016

RE: OMHSAS Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health Services Update

In recent years, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) has received stakeholder feedback regarding the Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health Services (Children's Bureau). Four major themes emerged from this feedback relating to communication, regulations and policy, operational consistency, and system partner engagement.

OMHSAS retained Mercer Health and Benefits LLC (Mercer) in May 2015 to independently assess concerns about the timeliness, consistency, and effectiveness of communication, coordination, and operational protocols relating to the Children's Bureau.

The primary goal of the review was to identify ways in which OMHSAS can improve internal operations as well as communication and collaboration with system partners. Specifically, OMHSAS requested that Mercer review the following areas:

- Timeliness of decision making and related communications;
- Regulatory and policy support for decisions;
- Consistency of decisions over time based on criteria;
- Use of corrective action plans; and
- Engagement with system partners.

The study corroborated OMHSAS' own findings regarding the Children's Bureau's strengths and opportunities for improvement, and provided potential responses for OMHSAS' consideration. Mercer's review process included:

- Three two-hour focus groups with OMHSAS system partners, including representatives from Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators (PACA), Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA), Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations (BH-MCOs), and HealthChoices-Behavioral Health Contractors.
- A desk review of relevant materials, including the Children's Bureau policies and protocols.
- Interviews with OMHSAS' Bureau of Operations, Policy, and the Children's Bureau.
- Research on other states regarding selected topics.

A summary of Mercer's review is attached.

OMHSAS Moves Forward

In alignment with DHS' priorities of increasing access to high-quality services, serving more people in the community, improving customer service at all levels, and modernizing program integrity, OMHSAS is moving forward to improve services for children and adolescents.

Steps forward include:

- **A review and consolidation of regulations related to Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services (BHRS).** OMHSAS is concentrating efforts on the development and synthesis of appropriate regulatory guidance relating to improving the quality of, and accessibility to, BHRS for children and adolescents who need it. In 2016-2017, OMHSAS will engage with stakeholders to draft regulatory changes, with the expectation that proposed BHRS regulations will be released for public comment in mid-2017.
- **A strategic reorganization of OMHSAS leadership.** On March 7, 2016, Shannon Fagan joined OMHSAS as Children’s Bureau Director, and Sherry Peters became Director of the Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Program Development. Shannon and Sherry will work in tandem to cultivate a collaborative, professional, and strength-based work environment that prioritizes coordinated and effective processes, messaging, and communications, both internally and externally.
- **An organizational-wide effort to improve consistency and quality.** Moving forward, OMHSAS senior staff will focus on identifying areas of potential improvement, developing strategies to strengthen internal and external processes, promoting an organizational culture of collaboration, coordination, communication and cohesiveness, and monitoring our progress towards addressing the concerns voiced by OMHSAS stakeholders.
- **An emphasis on family and stakeholder engagement.** The involvement of PACA, RCPA, BH-MCO’s, and their contractors played an integral role in working to identify issues of concern. As OMHSAS takes measures to address stakeholder’s concerns, engagement of these system partners will continue to perform a critical function relating to progress monitoring. OMHSAS meets regularly with each organization and will provide periodic updates about Children’s Bureau operations.
- **A redefining of “customer service.”** To address concerns relating to responsiveness and professionalism, internal meetings have been held to stress the importance of holding OMHSAS staff to high standards of customer service. In addition, leadership has reaffirmed that external stakeholders, the families and individuals to whom we provide services, and agency partners are all ‘customers’ deserving of respect, responsiveness, and all other elements of good customer service.
- **A renewed focus on communications.** In response to concerns regarding effectiveness of internal and external communications, Shanna Klucar was appointed as Executive Assistant to the Deputy Secretary on January 30, 2016. Working closely with OMHSAS leadership, one of Shanna’s primary responsibilities is to foster improved communications within OMHSAS and between OMHSAS and the diverse stakeholder community.

Stakeholders are encouraged to submit questions, comments and concerns regarding Children’s Behavioral Health Services directly to Shannon Fagan, Bureau Director, at shafagan@pa.gov. In addition, you may reach Sherry Peters at shepeters@pa.gov and Shanna Klucar at sklucar@pa.gov.