



**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACCESS IN
BOULDER COUNTY**

Report presented by:



Boulder, March 17, 2023



INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of focus groups conducted to understand the perceptions of the participants about behavioral health access and what makes a trustworthy system, and to collect feedback about the Behavioral Health Access Solutions (BHAS) web page.

The focus groups were conducted in the Winter and Spring of 2023 with a group of individuals from different organizations and community members of Boulder County by YO Connection on behalf of Boulder County Community Services Strategic Initiatives' Behavioral Health Hub Navigation and Behavioral Health Planning Teams.

The consultants will examine the data collected, the participants observations of BHAS, and our own research on the topic of behavioral health and will provide an overview of the participants, the main themes and insights learned from the focus groups discussions, and recommendations for improving behavioral health access. It will also cover suggestions as to how to market this tool to the Spanish-speaking community in Boulder County.

We want to thank Boulder County for promoting this initiative and offering the opportunity to listening the community and use their opinions to improve and optimize BH initiative so that it truly supports more equitable access.

We also want to thank the organizations that dedicated their knowledge and time to participate in this project: El Centro Amistad, Out Boulder, Center for People with Disabilities, Colorado Parent Coalition, City of Longmont - Children, Youth and Family, Parents Involved in Education (PIE), Sister Carmen, OUR Center, Brujula Comunitaria.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Involve partner agencies, cultural brokers, and other interested parties (community connectors) to provide feedback based on their perceptions and experiences with the behavioral health system in Boulder County.
- Contribute to the development of specific and measurable characteristics/criteria of a trusted system of behavioral health, and access.
- Introduce participants to the BHAS website, provide an opportunity to try it out and provide input about their impressions and experiences exploring it.
- Increase access to the historically underserved community to appropriate behavioral health resources and services.
- Develop a marketing plan and community informed messaging strategies to increase awareness about the tool.

METHODOLOGY

The focus groups were conducted with a diverse group of individuals and community members who offer support and services to more vulnerable populations, specifically the communities of people who are Spanish-speaking, LGBTQ, immigrants, people with different disabilities, among others. The focus group consisted of 56 participants, 5 men, 48 women, 3 non-binaries, ranging in age from 30 to 62 years old, 40 Spanish Speakers-bilingual, 16 English Speakers. The participants were from diverse backgrounds, with varying educational and employment levels.

The first discussion was structured around a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' thoughts and experiences regarding their experiences with behavioral health services. The first focus groups lasted between 1 and 2 hours and were recorded for later analysis. We did a total of 9 groups with the organizations mentioned before.

Six of the groups also participated in a second meeting where they shared their comments and feedback after testing the BHAS website for 2 or 3 hours.

FOCUS GROUPS

In this section we share some of the more frequent answers of the participants, taking as a guide the questions that were presented. We also present a summary of the comments/feedback.

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term Behavioral Health?

- Access to mental health. I can find a psychologist.
- It could be difficult to understand for regular people, it's more for professionals.
- It is limited to mental and behavior issues.
- It relates only to the behaviors of individuals.
- It could be, how do you take care of your health?
- Term BH is confusing, does not represent the variety of categories of services covered.
- Term should be clear as well in English as in Spanish.
- Title is not "sticking" for Spanish Speakers (it can be difficult to remember it)
- Term related to mental health only.

2. Trustworthy Behavioral Health Roadmap

- Long term strategies and actions, it is not the "flavor of the month."
- Congruent: mission, objectives and actions are aligned.
- Credible, deliver what it offers.
- Lots of providers.
- User friendly.
- People actually get connected to services.
- Easy to navigate and use.
- Personalized support.
- Accessible language.
- Simple processes to follow.
- Inclusive, any population is welcome.
- Updating regularly.
- Culturally appropriate.
- Cultural connection.
- You feel welcome.
- Adapts to all ages.
- Everyone can belong.



3. What do you understand by access to Behavioral Health services/system?

- It's easy to get information and resources.
- One entrance/one open door.
- you will find what you need.
- Updates and gives you solutions.
- There are no barriers, everyone is welcome.
- it's in my own language.
- No bureaucracy at all
- People will receive benefits, affordable and inclusive services (no language barriers.)
- It is a list of places, services and people connected.
- Immediate response.
- Zero obstacles.
- Variety of locations.
- Well known and wide use.
- Options for everyone regardless of socioeconomic status or income.

Question	Summary of feedback
1 Meaning and name Behavioral Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This psychology-based term and mental health reference is confusing to many participants ● Does not communicate the scope of services encompassed in the system ● Term makes people think this is a directory of therapists ● Suggests that is for trying to change behavior
2. What access (to Behavioral Health services) means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being informed, resources well known, opportunities for all ● Equity/ Inclusive: language, accessible, reliable, welcoming ● Updated, efficient system with trustworthy information ● Easy to use without specific help of an specialist ● Affordability of services is important

3. Services that participants/ clients are generally seeking assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Access: dentist, mental health services, substance use, abuse, treatment and prevention services • Financial support (rent, food, education, utilities) • Family, children and youth resources about childcare, after school activities, tutoring, etc • Housing • Legal Services: immigration, support/advice to open business, legal and tax assistance • Domestic Violence Services • Education Services • Recreation and information on how to access community spaces <p>Childcare, afterschool programs</p>
4. What resources for referral does your organization currently use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted organizations and reliable staff with whom already have a relationship • Personal/professional connections • Internet searches • Internal resources, database, Google Drive • Other counties' websites • Other websites like: findhelp.com
5. Characteristics of an effective website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smartphone compatibility (App) • No more than three clicks to access the service • User friendly, direct and intuitive interface • Easy translation to other languages • Live chat option would be helpful • Link to social media • Updated information • Responsive to changes and additions
7. Tech search and communications tools that community uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smartphones • Google • Social media - especially WhatsApp, and Facebook) <p>Radio, flyers, pamphlets</p>



WHAT MAKES BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES THAT CAN BE TRUSTED?

From our data interpretation and analysis, and learning from other models and information, a trustworthy system of behavioral health services would have several key characteristics. Some of these characteristics include:

1. **Accessibility:** The system should be easily accessible to all individuals, regardless of their financial situation, location, or demographic characteristics. This could include offering telehealth services, sliding-scale fees, and outreach programs to underserved communities.
2. **Affordability:** an affordable behavioral health system is one that provides accessible and effective treatment options for individuals seeking care, regardless of their financial situation or background.
3. **Comprehensive services:** The system should offer a range of services to address the diverse needs of clients.
4. **Collaborative care:** Providers in the system should work collaboratively to ensure that clients receive coordinated and holistic care that addresses both their physical and mental health needs.
5. **Client-centered approach:** The system should prioritize the needs and preferences of clients, with providers working collaboratively with clients to develop individualized plans that are tailored to their specific needs and goals.
6. **Culturally appropriate services:** Clients would be referred to services that are designed and delivered in a manner that is respectful, responsive, and inclusive of the diverse cultural backgrounds and needs of individuals seeking services. This means that service providers must recognize and respect the unique cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the individuals they serve, and strive to deliver care that is sensitive to their cultural identities and experiences. This may include adapting services approaches to be more culturally appropriate, providing language and translation services, and ensuring that the physical environment and materials used are culturally sensitive and relevant. Also, the immigrant needs to feel safe, that means that the amount of paperwork and requirements should be simplified.
7. **Supportive environment:** The system should foster a supportive and compassionate environment that is free from stigma and discrimination, with providers who are knowledgeable, and empathetic.
8. **Quality assurance:** The system should have quality assurance measures in place to ensure that providers are delivering high-quality services and that clients are receiving effective and safe services.
9. **Transparency:** clients and providers should have access to transparent information about the system's policies, procedures, and outcomes. This could include client satisfaction surveys, provider qualifications and training, and evidence of successful outcomes.



DISCUSSION

The focus group provided valuable insights into the perceptions of community members and organizations.

It is important to mention that there was strong opinion and discussion about the term Behavioral Health because they related with mental health services, and how confusing it is if it is an intention to include other categories of services such as housing, financial support, recreation, legal services etc.

It is understood that access to behavioral health services refers to the ability of individuals to obtain appropriate resources and services when needed.

Behavioral health is a crucial aspect of overall health and wellbeing. However, many individuals face barriers when trying to access the appropriate care and resources to address their needs.

Access to behavioral health services also impacted by factors such as affordability, availability, convenience of services, and equity, among others. Individuals should be able to access services without facing financial and language barriers or lengthy wait times. Services should also be available in areas that are easily accessible to individuals in need. It is a critical component of promoting overall health and well-being and ensuring that individuals have the support they need to manage their needs.

One of the most relevant things they shared is that services are more reliable and accessible when the people who work in the organization make customers feel that they are welcome, well-treated, respected, transmit trust, and can establish a relationship.

The findings from the focus group discussion highlight the significant challenges that individuals face when trying to access behavioral health services. Stigma, insurance coverage, affordability, accessibility, lack of documentation and cultural competence emerged as significant themes that affect access to care. These barriers can have significant implications for individuals' outcomes and overall quality of life, and they can determine the use or not of the tool or services.

To address these challenges, there is a need for a multi-approach. This may include increasing public education and awareness around behavioral health, expanding access to affordable care, increasing the number of behavioral health providers in underserved areas, and promoting cultural competence training for providers.

Access to behavioral health services is a critical issue that affects a community's overall wellbeing. The findings from the focus group discussion highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to address the various barriers that individuals face when seeking care.

By improving access to behavioral health services, we can promote better outcomes and improve overall health and wellbeing for individuals and communities.