



Leading Change 2.0: Advancing the Behavioral Health of the Nation 2015-2018—
<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/PEP14-LEADCHANGE2>

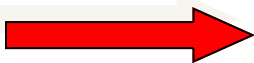
SAMHSA Strategic Initiatives—<http://beta.samhsa.gov/about-us/strategic-initiatives>

Issue 37

focus

What is the Focus?

The *Focus* newsletter highlights important issues in mental health, providing timely information on a range of topics, including work-force development, supported education, organizational development and sustainability, peer-to-peer services, youth transition and system transformation. Have a suggestion for a topic? Let us know!



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SAMHSA Unveils Its New Strategic Plan, *Leading Change 2.0*

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, better known as SAMHSA, is the federal agency that takes the lead in dealing with behavioral health in our nation. Just like any other organization, from the largest private corporation to the smallest, grassroots advocacy group, SAMHSA has a mission and vision. The agency's distinct mission is: "to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities." Its vision is "that all Americans enjoy a high-quality, self-directed, satisfying life in a community of their choice."

As with all organizations, **the key to enacting a mission and realizing a vision is deliberate, thoughtful planning.** That planning process results in a "strategic plan," which is a document with specific goals and objectives that lays out how it will enact its mission and vision over the mid- to long-term. SAMHSA has just released its newest plan, which it calls *Leading Change 2.0: Advancing the Behavioral Health of the Nation 2015-2018*. This document will strongly influence the national conversation for behavioral health in coming years, so it's important for advocates and anyone in the behavioral health community to know what it includes.

Consumer Input

In crafting its new strategic plan, SAMHSA has made an effort to involve the voices of the people with lived experience and other Americans that the agency serves in identifying priorities. By gathering input from the community to be served, a large federal agency like SAMHSA can ensure that the plan it develops reflects the real-world concerns of its stakeholders, and ideally end up with a document in which people feel truly invested.

During the period when SAMHSA received feedback from the public, more than 1,400 ideas, comments and suggestions were received. Although the feedback was wide ranging, the agency was able to identify several important areas of concern:

- Meeting the needs of a variety of groups including older adults, rural and other underserved communities;
- Stronger emphasis on resources and supports for caretakers and family members;
- Increased emphasis on behavioral health treatment for individuals with substance use and/or mental disorders (including serious mental illnesses);
- Enhanced training and education for peer providers;
- Collaboration across other U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Operating Divisions, such as the Health Resources and Services Administration; and Engagement with faith-based organizations.

Hopefully you were able to share your input with SAMHSA, and recognize some of your own ideas in this list. You can read more about the public comment system and its role in shaping SAMHSA's priorities at <http://beta.samhsa.gov/about-us/strategic-initiatives/public-comment-summary>.

What's In The Strategic Plan?

The full strategic plan, *Leading Change 2.0: Advancing the Behavioral Health of the Nation 2015-2018* can be found online at <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/PEP14-LEADCHANGE2>. It's a 34-page document that includes some of the acronyms and bureaucratic language that typifies any government planning document. At the same time, it has some very practical, tangible goals at its root. One can best understand SAMHSA's direction by examining the six "Strategic Initiatives" that form the basis of its new strategic plan. These six points of emphasis will be the priorities that drive SAMHSA's work, and our nation's behavioral health agenda, over the next four years. Here's what they are, and what they mean in practical terms:

Prevention of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness – The first Strategic Initiative emphasizes prevention, and signals a desire to intervene sooner when behavioral health issues develop. The assumption that drives this desire is that outcomes can be improved and financial and social burdens reduced when behavioral health issues are either treated before becoming crises or prevented altogether. The plan indicates that there are "opportunities to use evidence-based approaches to prevent the occurrence of disorders, establish building blocks for the healthy development of young people and others, and limit environmental exposures that increase risk." SAMHSA's efforts are connected with the National Prevention Strategy, which guides the Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to promote health and wellness. (Read more about it at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/prevention/strategy/>.) In terms of specific goals, SAMHSA seeks to *reduce substance use and depressive episodes among youth aged 12-17, prevent and reduce underage and youth drinking, reduce suicides and suicide attempts, and prevent and reduce prescription drug and opioid abuse.*

Health Care and Health Systems Integration – Another area of emphasis has to do with the trend toward integration. Practically, this means that behavioral health will become a part of the traditional physical health arena, and vice versa. SAMHSA expresses a desire to reduce "fragmentation," in which one person receives care from multiple sources that don't connect with each other. The desire here is to create more effective networks of care that can communicate with each other, and produce better results. It's about tying the different parts of the system together, so they work in concert. Goals under this initiative include *integrating behavioral health with physical health, social support networks and prevention efforts, implementing new Medicaid and Medicare provisions available through the Affordable Care Act, developing new financing models that support integrated care, fully implementing parity guidelines that were passed into law through the Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, and developing new ways to measure successful integration.*

Trauma and Justice – The third Strategic Initiative reflects an awareness of the many complex connections between the mental health system and the justice system. Much attention is given to trauma, and the importance of adopting a trauma-informed approach to justice. (See SAMHSA's SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach at http://store.samhsa.gov/product/SMA14-4884?WT.mc_id=EB_20141008_SMA14-4884.) It includes reference to trauma from disasters, military service, and community trauma. SAMHSA appears to have a strong understanding of the link between trauma and behavioral health issues, and a desire to infuse that understanding into the nation's approach to violence, justice

and incarceration. Goals in this area include *implementing and evaluating a large-scale trauma-informed approach, reducing recidivism by infusing recovery and trauma understanding in the justice system, and reducing the behavioral health impact of disasters on individuals and communities.*

Recovery Support – Recovery has long been at the center of SAMHSA’s approach to behavioral health, and the latest strategic plan reaffirms that commitment. This is the Strategic Initiative that emphasizes the desire to partner with and empower people with lived experience, as it opens with a promise to “promote partnering with people in recovery from mental illnesses and substance use disorders and their family members to guide the behavioral health system.” It defines the venues in which a life in recovery should be supported as health, home, purpose and community. These four areas correlate to the provision of effective, integrated care (health), stable housing (home), meaningful employment, education and other life activities (purpose) and relationships with social networks (community). Specific goals are *improving the behavioral and physical health of people with behavioral health issues, increasing access to permanent housing, increasing competitive employment and education, and promoting community living.*

Health Information Technology – With the passage of the Affordable Care Act and the increasing use of electronic record keeping throughout the healthcare sector, SAMHSA has chosen to include encouraging the adoption of health information technology in the behavioral health area as a priority. This Strategic Initiative works hand-in-hand with the Integration initiative, as it mentions the need for behavioral health providers to adopt systems that “talk to” other medical record systems, so care can be facilitated and coordinated across multiple providers. It also mentions the need to protect privacy and maintain patient control of data. Goals include *developing technology and standards that enable “interoperable exchange” of data, promoting the adoption of new technology among providers and patients, developing data standards that ensure security, and disseminating technologies that promote prevention and wellness.*

Workforce Development – The final Strategic Initiative will likely be of interest to people with lived experience, as it points to the opportunity to greatly increase the number of peer support professionals working as part of the mental health workforce. Generally speaking, the emphasis with this initiative is to simply grow the workforce to meet the demand that is anticipated to result from increased mental health parity. Within that, SAMHSA sees an opportunity to bring more people with lived experience into the workforce, while also building evidence for their effectiveness. Goals in the area include *developing training and education tools for the BH workforce, supporting deployment of peer providers in various settings, doing data collection to measure the workforce needs nationally, and to bring more funding to the BH workforce.*

The Way Forward

As Leading Change 2.0 notes in its conclusion, it is a living document that proposes a way forward for SAMHSA and the nation. There are certainly any number of unforeseen factors that could influence how effectively the plan is realized. Nonetheless, it represents a positive vision for behavioral health in the coming four years, that values the role of lived experience, recognizes the importance of recovery, and recognizes the ability of peers to help meet the challenges that will need to be met as the country continues to work to revision its approach to mental health and addiction.



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