

*Setting the Standard in Health Care Excellence*

September 26, 2023

Board of Supervisors  
County of Ventura  
800 S. Victoria Ave.  
Ventura, CA 93009

**Subject:**

**Ratification of the Health Care Agency's (HCA) Submission of an Application for Supplemental Funding for a California Department of Health Care Services CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Sustainability Program Grant to Support Behavioral Health Counselors in Acute Care Hospitals to Build Capacity for Improved Treatment of Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Disorders.**

**Recommendation:**

That your Board ratify the Health Care Agency's (HCA) submission of the CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Sustainability Program grant application submitted on August 29, 2023, for supplemental funding for the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Program (Bridge Navigator Program) to support behavioral health counselors in acute care hospitals to build capacity for improved treatment of substance use disorders (SUDs) and mental health disorders at Ventura County Medical Center (VCMC) (Exhibit 1) and Santa Paula Hospital (SPH) (Exhibit 2).

**Reason for Ratification:**

HCA submitted the Bridge Navigator Program grant supplemental funding application on August 29, 2023. This program has been operating since March 2021, and your Board approved the most recent grant award on November 1, 2022, for the grant year which ended on August 31, 2023. Notice of the availability of supplemental funding was received in late August 2023, with an application deadline of September 22, 2023, with priority consideration given to applications received by September 5, 2023. HCA submitted the grant funding application in anticipation of your Board's approval.

**Background:**

SUDs are common nationwide and across the State of California resulting in significant individual health impacts and economic burdens in terms of healthcare costs, lost productivity, addiction treatment costs, and criminal justice involvement. Nearly 8% of

Californians, or roughly 2.7 million people, struggle with SUDs, however only 10% of those affected receive any type of treatment for this condition.

Those with SUDs also have the highest mortality rate among individuals with mental and behavioral health disorders. According to the County of Ventura Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) 2021 special report on fatal overdoses, 2,127 deaths were reported to the MEO, and it was determined that 289 deaths were due to overdose due to medications, alcohol, and/or illicit drugs. This represents a 33% increase compared to 2020 and a 94% increase compared to 2019. Deaths due to fentanyl and benzodiazepines showed the highest rates of increase of all substances in 2021 over 2020. Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a physical and psychological dependence on opioids found in prescription medications, drugs such as heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. OUD is a growing public health crisis. In California, nearly half of all drug overdose deaths involve opioids, resulting in more than 2,400 fatalities in 2018. The death rate from fentanyl increased 10-fold from 2015 to 2019.

Often, people struggling with OUD do not have a primary care provider, lack health insurance, or avoid care due to stigma associated with the condition. Hospital emergency departments (EDs) regularly serve as the first point of care for persons struggling with OUD where it is common for patients to present with a crisis such as an overdose. Increasingly medication assisted treatment services in EDs are becoming the standard of care for OUD and are a key strategy to address gaps in OUD treatment and improve long-term patient outcomes. Research has shown that patients admitted to EDs for OUD who were treated with ED-initiated buprenorphine and then managed in primary care were twice as likely to remain in addiction treatment one month later. Research has shown that one in 20 patients treated for nonfatal opioid overdose in an ED died within a year of their visit. One in five patients who died within a year died within the first month and particularly within the first two days, making this a critical time window for intervention. These numbers are lower for patients on medication-assisted treatment.

### **Discussion:**

In FY21-22, VCMC and SPH were first awarded grant funding for the Bridge Navigator program. Subsequently, DHCS requested additional applications at the end of the first grant term. During the period September 1, 2022, through August 31, 2023, VCMC and SPH were each awarded \$120,000 to subsidize the cost of two full-time substance use navigators. For the year beginning September 1, 2023, the available grant funding was reduced. DHCS is now strengthening the sustainability of the existing program by awarding a select group of hospitals \$25,000 each to use towards navigator positions. Funding is currently available for 35 California hospitals, and on August 29, 2023, HCA submitted applications for both VCMC and SPH. The announcement of the grant selection is expected on November 15, 2023.

In October 2023, VCMC is planning the expansion of detoxification services. The additional substance use navigator provided for these expanded services will be funded through Conejo Health, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing public

health services, with a primary focus on SUDs, to the Conejo Valley and other communities across the United States. HCA will be returning to your Board in October with the proposed agreement with Conejo Health for this navigator position. If the Bridge Navigator Program funding is awarded, the monies will be used to partially offset the cost of the navigator position in the expansion of detoxification services. The existing two navigators in the EDs have been extended utilizing opioid settlement funds.

This Board letter has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, Auditor-Controller's Office, and County Counsel. If you have any questions regarding this item, please contact Danielle Gabele, Chief Nurse Executive, at (805) 652-6578.

  

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JOHN FANKHAUSER, MD  
CEO, Ventura County Medical Center and Santa Paula Hospital  

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BARRY L. ZIMMERMAN  
Health Care Agency Director

Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1 – CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Sustainability Program Application –  
Ventura County Medical Center
- Exhibit 2 – CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Sustainability Program Application –  
Santa Paula Hospital