

New Initiative Aims to Advance Primary Care and Behavioral Health Integration in CA through Policy and Practice Change

The Center will advance health policy solutions and create a care system that meets the needs of individuals and addresses racial and economic disparities.

BERKELEY, CA, USA, October 15, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. \(JSI\)](#) recently launched [Delta Center California](#), a 2.5-year initiative that brings together behavioral health and primary care leaders to accelerate care improvement and integration in Medi-Cal through policy and practice change. It is supported by the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(RWJF\)](#) and will run through December 2022.



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*Catherine Teare, Associate
Director for High-Value Care
at CHCF*

Delta Center California ultimately aims to advance health policy solutions and create a care system that better meets the goals and needs of individuals and families, and addresses racial and economic disparities. The goals of the Delta Center California initiative are to:

- Foster collaboration and collective action between primary care and behavioral health at the state and county levels in California;
- Build knowledge and ability of state associations to ensure that changes in incentives and care systems meet the goals and needs of individuals and families; and
- Accelerate payment and care integration through on-the-

ground projects in selected sites across California.

“In the U.S., individuals with serious mental illness die 15 to 30 years earlier than those without mental illness,” said Robin Haller, Delta Center California Project Director. “This disparity isn’t driven by suicides or overdoses; by and large, these individuals are dying from the same chronic physical health conditions that are leading causes of death among the general population. But they are dying decades earlier. This underscores the urgent need for improved integration of physical and behavioral health care for these individuals.”



Delta Center California was inspired by the model of the Delta Center for a Thriving Safety Net, a national RWJF-funded initiative that launched in 2017, which funded and convened national and state associations representing health centers and behavioral health organizations in 12 states to advance policy and practice change. As the program office leader of the national Delta Center, JSI recognized both the potential for a similar effort in California and the need for such an effort to be tailored to the unique California policy environment.

The California Health Care Foundation also recognized the potential to give California’s state associations, representing primary care and behavioral health providers and payers, a neutral venue to identify and explore policy changes to facilitate integrated care in Medi-Cal. The initiative would also provide a forum for the state associations to explore implementation opportunities and challenges associated with CalAIM, the multiyear process led by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to improve the health outcomes and quality of life experienced by Medi-Cal patients. While the current COVID-19 crisis has delayed CalAIM implementation, the pandemic has also elevated the critical importance of having a strong, coordinated and sustainable safety-net system for all Californians.

“Delta Center California provides a remarkable opportunity to improve the care, experience, and health outcomes for Californians with mental health and substance use needs, and their families,” said Catherine Teare, Associate Director for High-Value Care at CHCF. “This is a major initiative to advance integration in California’s safety net, tailoring the core approaches used in the successful national model for a California context, and bringing a focus on racial equity and consumer voices to the table.”

Led by JSI, Delta Center California is the product of a planning process that engaged over 30 California stakeholders and thought leaders. The resulting initiative focuses on adults in need of specialty mental health and/ or substance use services. In addition to JSI, the program office includes Molly Brassil of Aurrera Health Group, Jen Powell of Powell and Associates, and Rio

Holaday. Delta Center California includes two primary workstreams: a State Policy and Partnership Roundtable with nine state-level partners and a 16-month Learning Lab bringing together local provider-payer teams and state partners. Learning Lab local teams will be selected and funded through a competitive proposal process in 2021. The initiative will also have an Advisory Group with representatives from our state-level partners, CHCF, the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, the National Health Law Program, and other California thought leaders.

"I'm excited about the opportunity for statewide associations to come together and set an agenda, together, about the future of the integrated care delivery system," said Allie Budenz, Assistant Director of Quality Improvement at the California Primary Care Association. "It's not something that we often get to do and it's a great chance to learn from each other and to grow with each other."

California organizations representing and supporting health centers and behavioral health providers and payers acknowledge and salute the importance of advancing policy and practice change using a lens of how such changes can advance racial equity in the state.

"I'm most looking forward to working in a collaborative way with other behavioral health leaders in the context and through the lens of racial equity," said Percy Howard, President, and CEO at the California Institute For Behavioral Health Solutions. "Without this, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for us to achieve our health equity goals for all Californians."

Delta Center California will bring together leaders from the following organizations to collaborate on the State Policy & Partnership Roundtable:

- California Alliance of Child and Family Services (CA Alliance)
- California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems/CA Health Care Safety Net Institute (CAPH/SNI)
- California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA)
- California Institute For Behavioral Health Solutions (CIBHS)
- California Primary Care Association (CPCA)
- County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA)
- Local Health Plans of California (LHPC)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness California (NAMI CA)

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