

2023-2025 Mental Health Expansion Grant Workgroup Overview

Background:

Between May 2022 and January 2023, the State Program Office (SPO) convened a Mental Health Expansion Grant (MHEG) workgroup to inform State School Based Health Center (SBHC) program priorities related to funding and grant requirements for the Capacity Grant and Youth-Led Project Grant. The workgroup was comprised of 17 partners from SBHCs, including SBHC coordinators, mental health providers, mental health agency supervisors, health department staff and youth engagement coordinators. Participation was voluntary and workgroup size fluctuated at each meeting.

Since 2015 MHEG funds have been divided between the Capacity Grant and the Youth-Led Project Grant. The Capacity Grant is intended to support mental health service in state certified SBHCs and primarily funds the salaries of Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs) or Qualified Mental Health Associates (QMHAs). The Youth-Led Project Grant is intended to support youth engagement through youth-led mental health prevention projects and SBHC projects.

Currently, the budget for the Capacity Grant is \$6.8 million. Initial funding was distributed through an open application process; however, since 2017 award amounts have been determined by a funding formula created through a previous MHEG workgroup. MHEG Capacity award amounts have remained relatively consistent since then. The Youth-Led Project budget is \$710,000 and in 2021 the SPO opened applications for the first time in since 2015.

Workgroup Purpose

The impetus for the workgroup was twofold – to address gaps in Capacity Grant funding across sites and ensure the grant requirements are responsive to the current landscape of certified SBHCs considering ongoing and emerging student mental health needs and workforce shortages.

The current funding formula for the Capacity Grant is based on various data points related to unmet mental health need and while the intent is to distribute funds equitably based on specific community needs the SPO has seen ongoing disparities in award sizes due to initial award sizes prior to the funding formula being developed in 2016 (in 2021-2023 the stand alone site with the lowest award amount receives \$52,000 while the stand alone SBHC with the highest funding amount receives \$225,000 – and this patterns exists when looking at SBHCs that are part of SBHC systems¹ as well). Additionally, the funding formula can be difficult to

¹ The SPO defines a system as the SBHCs operating under a shared medical sponsor within a given county.

understand and update to reflect current data. There is also no clear way to bring new sites in with funding formula since the calculations are based on existing award sizes.

The SPO has convened workgroups in the past when updating grant requirements and while there were no major issues with the current grant requirements the SPO is committed to hearing feedback prior to making any changes that could have caused unintentional harm.

Capacity Funding:

The workgroup identified priorities for funding decisions that included minimizing cuts to existing grantees, sustainability, equity, flexibility with spending and maximizing access points across all certified SBHCs. With these values as a guide the SPO presented multiple proposals to the workgroup. These included:

- Base boost model where all sites would get a fixed base amount and then an increase based on three factors:
 - being a single site
 - not being an FQHC
 - being a rural site.
- Updated funding formula with points awarded based on:
 - CDC Social Vulnerability Index for SBHC zip code
 - Unmet mental health need using 2022 Student Health Survey
 - Provider to population ratio
- Equal funding for all sites
- Various tiered funding models where awards vary by number of sites

After two 90-minute workgroup meetings discussing potential funding scenarios the workgroup decided on one of the tiered models that best aligned with the workgroup goals. The model would work as follows:

- Every system will start with \$175,000 for the first site
- For a system with two sites, they will get \$175,000 for the first site **plus** \$125,000 for their second site
- For a system with three or more sites, they will get the initial \$175,000 for the first site, \$125,000 for their second site, **plus** \$50,000 for each additional site with no cap on total award.

Although funding is based on the number of sites, SBHC systems would be able to move their award to as many or as few SBHCs within their system to best meet the needs of youth in their communities.

Currently, the SPO does not have sufficient funding in the MHEG capacity budget to fully fund systems in the 2023-2025 biennium according to the proposed tiered funding model. SPO therefore proposed creating “bumpers” for the 2023-2025 biennium to get systems closer to the proposed funding model while staying within the current budget. The “bumpers” would

minimize the amount a system could gain or lose in 2023-2025 and are calculated based on if a system's current award (**column E in attached spreadsheet**) is less than or greater than the award as determined by the tiered model detailed above (**column G in the attached spreadsheet**).

- Decrease 10% bumper: If a system's current award (**Column E**) is greater than the tiered model award amount (**Column G**) that system's award would be decreased by 10% of current award in 2023-2025 (*e.g., if the current award is \$350,000 for a system that has two sites, and the tiered model award amount is \$300,000 that system would lose \$35,000 and be awarded \$315,000 in 2023-2025*).
- Increase 10% bumper: If a system's current award (**Column E**) is less than the tiered model award amount (**Column G**) that system's award would be increased by 10% of current award in 2023-2025 (*e.g., if the current award is \$120,000 for a system that has two sites, and the tiered model award amount is \$300,000 that system would gain \$12,000 and be awarded \$132,000 in 2023-2025*).

In addition to the workgroup meetings, the SPO set up individual meetings to elicit feedback from any system that would lose money in 2023-2025 with this current proposal. Some systems indicated they would be able to sustain a funding cut with little to no impact to their program while others expressed concerns around impact. These concerns included:

- Potential decrease in provider hours / difficulty staying fully staffed
- Strained partnership dynamics with schools or school districts who entered into agreements with SBHC based on current funding model and matched financial investments
- Disproportionate funding cuts for rural SBHCs
- Loss of flexibility to provide non-billable services
- Lack of considerations in proposal for sites that are not able to generate as much revenue due to system barriers or staffing models that limit eligibility for other state and federal funding / OHP reimbursement

The SPO's intent to eventually move toward fully implementing the tiered funding model without bumpers in future biennia if funding allows. Additionally, the SPO's intent is to extend MHEG awards to all systems in future biennia if funding allows. Future funding is largely dependent on legislative investment and the SPO has calculated the investment needed to implement the tiered funding model fully for all currently certified SBHCs and the SBHCs that are expected to be certified in 2023-2025. The current proposal only applies to current MHEG recipients is dependent on a slight overall budget increase that can be covered by the current SPO budget.

Capacity Requirements:

The workgroup spent two meetings reviewing and modifying Capacity Grant requirements. Minor changes were created, most notably:

- Clarify allowance to use funding across multiple staff positions
- Expand criteria to allow for staffing credential / certification types beyond QMHPs and QMHAs
- Remove language regarding suspension of funding for vacant positions
- Clarify the ability for systems to move money across their sites
- Strengthen language around culturally and linguistically responsive health services, youth centered environments, school partnerships, and training priorities
- Allow sites to request exemption for specific grant requirements if doing so allows for more responsive service delivery in their community.

Youth-Led Projects:

The workgroup had an additional meeting to discuss the Youth-Led Project Grant's funding distribution, application process and grant requirements.

Currently, many grantees utilize this funding to partially cover the salary of a staff position focused on youth engagement in SBHCs and SBHC host schools. While the workgroup identified a desire to extend the opportunity to receive this grant to other SBHCs the concern about losing existing staff is a barrier to doing so without increased funding. The workgroup identified that the current grant requirements provide the level of flexibility needed to authentically allow for youth determine the focus of the projects while meeting the goals of the grant. The workgroup recommended not redistributing money from the Capacity Grant to increase the Youth-Led Project Grant.

The workgroup did not convene again about the Youth-Led Project Grant but based on the recommendations the SPO proposal for the Youth-Led Project Grant is:

- Modify grant requirements to:
 - Incorporate a partnership model (either a culturally specific or regionally appropriate community-based organization)
 - Stipulate funding cannot be used for salaries of staff not directly supporting the grant
 - Heighten health equity requirement
- Instead of accepting application from all SBHC systems, the SPO will connect individually with current grantees to:
 - Assess interest in continuing as a grant recipient
 - Request an updated budget
 - Request an updated proposal for 2023-2025
- Depending on interest from current grantees and projected budget the SPO would either:

- Put out a request to all SBHCs to submit a letter of interest for the 2023-2025 Youth-Led Project Grant, or
- Put out a request exclusively to rural SBHCs to submit a letter of interest for the 2023-2025 Youth-Led Project Grant
- Depending on the quantity of letters of interest received the SPO would invite interested SBHCs / systems to apply for funding
- Until there is additional legislative investment, the SPO would continue to fund the 2023-2025 grantees

Survey

In February 2023 the SPO sent out a survey to all SBHC contacts including Coordinators, Health Department contacts and MHEG contacts specifically regarding the Capacity Grant. The survey asked about overall support for the proposed changes and feedback on the impact of proposed changes could have on the SBHCs. The survey was completed by 24 individuals representing 22 counties.

Survey results:

- Most responses indicated “very supportive” of both the grant requirement changes and the funding proposal changes (67% and 54% respectively) while one response indicated “not at all supportive” for both questions on proposed changes.
- For systems set to receive additional funding 94% responded “yes” while one responded “unsure” when asked if they would be able to utilize increased funding
- For systems set to receive additional funding if there was a legislative increase 72% responded “yes” when asked if they would like a mechanism to decline all or part of increased funding to reallocate funds to new sites or sites with lower award amounts
- For systems set to lose funding 75% responded “yes” when asked if they would apply for additional funding were it to become available

Survey Quotes:

- In some of the rural communities the need is high for mental health even though the population is smaller. With less treatment agencies available, or overwhelmed treatment agencies the SBHC gets utilized a lot more. A reduction in funding has the potential to reduce staffing which can cause more strain on the community
- The funding we receive from the SPO has never been enough to fully support our SBHC. We are always running in the red and also rely on significant funding from our sponsor agency. The possibility of losing funding is very worrisome for this reason. It may force us to cut staffing.
- Our SBHC does not have many billable visits to supplement our budget. We have infrastructure built with the previous funding amount and it will be very difficult for us to adjust to a lower amount of funding.

- While this results in a decrease for us, it is a "soft" decrease and continues to uphold SBHCs work across the state. I guess it feels equitable.
- I appreciate the flexibility for programs to use the funds as most needed for their program/school/community
- I appreciate the eye toward overall SBHC success in Oregon and equity qualities of the proposed changes.
- New language moves us "gently" towards greater accountability, which we need for internal pressures.
- Flexibility in staffing models and movement of funds is much appreciated
- The allocation is going to help serve more sites with multiple services that meet their unique needs. By offering more funding to each site with each successive tier, SBHC can meet more students where they are while creating equity and flexibility.
- These proposed changes would allow us to better serve the population at our High School and reduce the amount of time students must wait on the waiting list, which at some points has been a year long, to see the SBHC mental health professionals.
- As a single SBHC, this works for us in making us more financially stable and supporting more activities we'd like to do.
- The previous funding levels seemed pretty random, and the new system seems more equitable.
- If the Tiered Funding was approved, it would allow me to hire more QMHP and QMHA levels at the schools.
- I would welcome a mechanism to decline once our core program staffing was stable, with our future access model I can anticipate where less support would be possible.
- I also understand the 10% increase piece, but I do think that there are systems that already had a large amount of money (historically) that potentially should have not received a 10% increase while others could have used more.
- I really want to new SBHCs to have the ability to access BH funding the same as all the rest that got the lion's share when this funding first came out.
- I do have concern that there are no reserved funds for new/planned SBHCs. As we all know, needs assessments continually cite mental health concerns as top priorities for communities considering SBHCs. Without MHEG funding to support mental health care provider FTE at these locations, it makes sustaining new SBHCs more difficult.

Next Steps

Workgroup members indicated a preference for continuing to meet as a group to discuss ongoing and emerging issues related to behavioral health in SBHCs and the SPO will consider ways to continue to engage this group.

For the current biennium, the SPO will do the following as is relates to the workgroup's recommendations:

- Bring to CLHO for approval
- Amend contract with proposed changes – assuming flat funding
 - Will amend if additional funding is available through senate bill
 - Could include additional funding for Youth-Led Project Grant
- Determine mechanism for sites to decline increased funding and a way to reallocate to other programs
 - Intent to focus on new sites, sites that will lose funding with proposed changes and mental health prevention models
- Explore opportunities to ensure future funding for new sites similar to existing legislation for SBHC base funding for School Health Services Planning Grantees
- Provide ongoing technical assistance to support sites meeting grant requirements as needed
- Assess opportunities for youth feedback in ongoing decisions around funding allocation if there is future investment