

**Name:** Michael Brodsky, MD

**Professional Title, Organization:** Senior Medical Director, Community Health, L.A. Care Health Plan

**CHIP Title:** Improving Access to Mental Health Services in L.A. County Schools

### **Project Description:**

The crisis in adolescent mental health was highlighted in 2021 bulletins from the Surgeons General of California and the United States. Even before COVID, the incidence of adolescent major depression, suicidal ideation, and emergency room visits was on the rise. The profound death toll, sense of fear, economic disruption, and social isolation exacerbated the unprecedented stresses facing American youth. Communities of color were particularly hard hit by the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Public school systems in Los Angeles struggle daily with mental health crises for individual students and with their cumulative impact on the learning environment. In 2018-19 there were 7,661 incidents of suicidal ideation on campuses in the L.A. Unified School District alone.

The School Behavioral Health Incentive Program (SBHIP) provided the opportunity for Medi-Cal health plans to earn implement programming to help address this crisis. This CHIP project aimed to improve access to mental health services for children and adolescents in school districts across L.A. County. L.A. Care Health Plan collaborated with Health Net and the L.A. County Office of Education to plan, pilot, and implement a \$24 million project to bring telehealth services to students in multiple L.A. County school districts.

### **Key Findings and Lessons Learned:**

- Successful collaboration between L.A. Care, Health Net, and the L.A. County Office of Education to plan and implement a \$24 million telehealth initiative.
- 21 school districts and 4 charter school networks signed a no cost MOU. During Summer-Fall 2023, 18 additional districts are expected to sign no cost MOU's.
- During the first week of services 79 referrals were submitted from 32 separate schools.
- Between January and June, we have received over 750 referrals from 139 separate schools.
- A majority of referrals have come from school personnel, which require a treatment consent from the student and, often, the parent/guardian.
- Over 250 students have received between 1-10 telehealth sessions.
- 15% of students have "graduated" following brief treatment.

### **Next Steps:**

- Improve referral yield by working with school districts to obtain student/guardian consents.
- Help ensure sustainable funding by integrating this program into the Statewide Multi-Payer Fee Schedule (going live 2024)
- Expand school district footprint.
- Collaborate and mentor other counties.