

Mental Health and Primary Care integration  
March 2009

The Safety Net Clinic Coalition identified the integration of mental health services with primary medical care as a high priority issue at their November 2007 retreat. SNCC decided to focus on this issue based on two factors: the high incidence of mental health concerns among safety net clinic patients; and the barriers encountered by the safety net clinics in assisting patients in accessing mental health services.

The Mental Health Access workgroup, made up of representatives from safety net clinics and County Mental Health staff, have met regularly since 11/07. The workgroup identified and works on three specific areas of focus:

- Education/training for primary care providers on mental health diagnosis and treatment, starting with pediatric mental health
- Referral systems between primary care providers at the safety net clinics and Santa Cruz county mental health for both children and adults
- Increasing access to mental health services for individuals with Medi-Cal, Medicare, Healthy Kids and Healthy Families benefits.

Accomplishments to date are:

- Increased communication and information flow between safety net clinic staff and county mental health through informal and formal meetings
- Development of forms to streamline the referral process to county mental health
- Implementation of system to electronically send referral forms and communicate on referral outcomes
- Scheduling of initial training for primary care providers on children's mental health diagnosis and treatment.
- Input to Santa Cruz County's Prevention and Early Intervention program of the Mental Health Services Act to support increased resources at safety net clinics, particularly for children.