

Meeting Summary for Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Behavioral Health Zoom Meeting

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Quick recap

The team discussed concerns about the new administration's plans to replace diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives with a focus on "merit, excellence, and intelligence." The meeting participants also had discussions about the group's legislative recommendations for the upcoming session, potential threats to Medicaid funding, and the need for proactive recommendations.

Next steps

Alice Forrester to send summary of Federal risks and relevant reports to the group.

Alice to invite Bill Halsey to present on Medicaid managed care concept and potential risks at the next meeting.

Howard to work on identifying and listing potential vulnerabilities across various departments.

Co-Chair Brenetta Henry to follow up with Carmen Teresa regarding consumer input on recommendations.

Alice to ensure consumer representation and input on recommendations.

All attendees to review recommendations and prepare feedback for the next meeting in January.

All attendees to stay alert for any threats or concerns related to DEI initiatives.

Alice to include data on Southern Connecticut State University's success in diversifying the MSW program workforce in the recommendations.

Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council to discuss reconvening the Coordination of Care subcommittee.

All attendees to consider and prepare additional recommendations for the next meeting.

Dr. Reyes to share the full report on the Health Horizons program outcomes, if possible.

Summary

Concerns Over DEI Initiatives and Cuts

Legislative Recommendations and New Administration

The meeting involved discussions about the group's legislative recommendations for the upcoming January session. Co-Chair Alice Forrester emphasized that the recommendations would come from the group to the BHPOC Group, and not from individual state employees. There was also a discussion about the shift in administration and the need for proactive recommendations. The group also discussed a presentation about what to expect from the new administration, with some uncertainty about the specifics. The meeting was recorded and shared on the website for future reference.

Medicaid Funding Threat in Project 2025

Alice discussed the potential threat to Medicaid funding in Project 2025, which could significantly impact Connecticut's healthcare system. She mentioned that Medicaid covers about half of Connecticut's children and that any cuts could have a significant impact on mental health services. Shayna added that cost savings have been a focus, but she's unsure about the specifics of the changes. Alice also mentioned the potential need for the State to fill in the gap if Federal funding stops, which could put pressure on any dollars meant to expand

services. The possibility of having someone from OPM come in to discuss the state's dollars was also raised.

Medicaid Funding and Reimbursement Concerns

Alice, Loida Reyes, Dr. Noel Casiano, Howard Drescher, and Lois Berkowitz discussed the funding and reimbursement of Medicaid in Connecticut. Loida shared that Southern had successfully implemented a health horizon initiative, which provided \$10,000 per student for tuition reimbursement and led to a significant increase in the student body's diversity. The team also discussed the potential impact of federal funding cuts on Medicaid, with Dr. Casiano and expressing concerns about the vulnerability of children and those with special healthcare needs. Alice suggested that the state would need to make decisions about eligibility and funding levels if federal funding were reduced. The conversation ended with an open question about how families relying on Medicaid would be affected by potential cuts.

Addressing Vulnerabilities in Medicaid Programs

The committee discussed potential vulnerabilities in their work, particularly in relation to the Department of Education and the Medicaid program. They considered the possibility of the Department of Education being closed and the implications this could have on federal funding and mandates. They also discussed the potential impact of changes to the Medicaid program, including the possibility of managed care becoming an option. The committee agreed on the importance of protecting their work and the families they serve and decided to continue their work despite potential changes. They also discussed the need for a list of potential vulnerabilities and the possibility of involving other state departments in this effort.

Connecticut's Fiscal Discipline and Challenges

Alice discussed the financial situation of Connecticut, highlighting the state's fiscal discipline since 2017. She explained that the state has been putting billions of dollars into the pension plan and the Rainy-Day fund, but this has led to underfunding of human services, education, and municipalities. She noted that the spending cap, which was set to be reviewed in 2025, is now under pressure due to the state's overspending. Alice also mentioned the potential impact of federal defunding on Medicaid and the need for a plan to maintain current funding levels. She expressed concern about the long-term effects of underfunding on the state's human services sector.

Committee Recommendations and Medicaid Funding

Alice discussed recommendations from various committees, including increasing the spending cap annually, incentivizing commercial insurers to increase their rates, and tracking improved outcomes for evidence-based practices. Brenetta emphasized the importance of consumer input and representation in decision-making processes. The group also discussed the need for alertness regarding potential threats to Medicaid funding and the importance of supporting each other. Bonni Hopkins suggested circulating information about the success of a program in diversifying the workforce. The next meeting was scheduled for early January (7).