

Health & Social Services Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

12:30 – 2:00 PM | JULY 11, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 3:01 PM on July 11, 2023, Jon Romine, Facilitator, convened the Health & Social Services Branch meeting with the following members present:

- Dawn Belamarich
- Maria Espinoza
- Nicole Calderone
- Tom Felke
- Madison Mitchell on behalf of Jeannine Joy
- Julie Ferguson
- Angela Katz
- David Brown

Facilitators and Branch Support:

- Jon Romine, Collaboratory
- Shanna Snider, Hagerty Consulting
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Mr. Romine provided a review of the work of the Recovery Task Force (RTF) and its Branches. Mr. Romine reviewed the timeline for the RTF, indicating the project is nearly halfway complete and emphasizing the transition to Phase Two of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Plan) that includes identifying and confirming Initiatives to align with Branch-specific Priorities. He noted the purpose of the meeting was to review the Initiative matrix and identify Technical Briefs as needed.

Ms. Everly asked about the Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) funding and projects that will go into the community mental health needs assessment. Mr. Romine gave an overview of the CDBG-DR funding process.

Branch Initiatives Discussion

Mr. Romine introduced the Initiatives that support the Priorities outlined by the Branch. Members agreed that the Initiatives support the Priorities of mobile health clinics, long-term recovery case management, and the behavioral healthcare system.

Branch Members discussed the needed funding for health assessment needs in the CDBG-DR Plan. Branch members reinforced the Initiative addressing the need for mental health resources and discussed how it differs from building a continuum of care. Ms. Belamarich asked about the next steps to address mental health. Mr. Romine described the Initiative development process and the next steps for including Projects that support the Initiative.

Ms. Everly discussed critical healthcare facilities and alternate sites for vulnerable populations. She stated that shelter needs do not address the needs of the population, therefore there is a need to harden critical healthcare facilities. Ms. Everly suggested health and social service buildings be built to the standard. She suggested that skilled nursing facilities be considered and hardened to support the discharge of patients.

Benjamin Abes, Public Safety Director, Lee County, was recognized to provide information on the sister facilities for evacuation. Members suggested a policy agreement to focus on pre-disaster planning for healthcare facilities. They also acknowledged a lack of pre-disaster planning resources for providers.

Ms. Katz stated that group homes are required and defined as critical. Branch Members agreed that a policy change within the County to clarify which facilities are critical should be an Initiative. Members agreed that to be effective in pre-disaster planning and to effectively meet the needs of vulnerable populations, a system of hardened group homes would need to be a regional network.

Branch Technical Briefs

No Technical Briefs were requested from the members.

Questions and Next Steps

The next Branch Meeting is scheduled for July 18, 2023, from 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM.

Members discussed Projects identified in the matrices including mental health support and first aid training. Ms. Belemarich suggested that destigmatized and normalizing mental health needs should be discussed more often.

Ms. Calderone stated that state-level providers are fully booked, which has caused burnout and creates a gap in resources. Members discussed virtual and remote options but questioned the availability and access to telehealth and mental health assistance.

Dr. Felker discussed available programs at educational institutions and identified a gap in workforce development pertaining to health services. He stated the need for investment in the education system to attract social and behavioral health clinicians. Mr. Romine suggested outlining Future Makers and the sectors by adding faculty for behavioral health providers to leverage opportunities in the region.

Members discussed the local economic structure and the gaps in behavioral health and social workforce. Ms. Everly suggested focusing on retaining social workers to address the needs of the community. Members discussed the importance of retaining clinical healthcare professionals.

Public Comment

There was no request for comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Romine thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 4:07 PM.