

Behavioral Health: Concerns and Grievances



There are multiple options to resolve concerns about services from the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Behavioral Health (BH), both formal and informal. DHHS-BH wants to work with partners and clients to resolve problems quickly, and at the lowest level possible. More formal processes are in place to make sure issues are addressed if they aren't able to be resolved right away.

First Steps to Resolve Concerns

If there's a problem or concern, clients are encouraged to talk to their provider. If talking to the provider doesn't fully resolve the issue, or the client isn't able or doesn't want to talk to the provider, they should reach out to the provider's supervisor. To talk to a provider's supervisor, call the main adult line at 707-268-2900 or the main children's line at 707-268-2800 and request a return call.

If anyone other than the client calls, DHHS-BH may not be able to talk to the caller, or even acknowledge that the individual is receiving care. DHHS-BH takes its ethical and legal responsibilities around confidentiality very seriously. In this situation, the caller can ask about how a client can sign a [release of information \(ROI\) \(PDF\)](#) if the client is willing to have their information shared.

Client Comment Cards

Client comment cards invite clients and community residents to provide feedback about services received, and a person can opt to receive a call or email back from staff on the [DHHS-Behavioral Health Quality Improvement \(QI\) team website](#). [A PDF of the comment card is also available](#).

Patients' Rights Advocate

The Patients' Rights Advocate (PRA) is an advocate for patients. Most of their work is done with clients who are on the inpatient unit. The PRA ensures the rights of clients are not "taken away" without good cause. Patients on the inpatient unit are provided clear information about their rights. Clients who are receiving outpatient services have specific rights as well, including the right to view and amend their medical record, the right to request a specific provider and the right to request a change of provider (see below). The PRA can be reached at 707-268-2995.

Grievance/Appeal Procedure

All Behavioral Health clients have the right to make a complaint or appeal a decision made by Behavioral Health. The form and method for both grievances and appeals is the same to start.

Grievance: an expression of dissatisfaction about anything regarding specialty mental health services received or the County Mental Health Plan. This can also be called a complaint.

Appeal: the review of a decision (e.g., denial or changes to services) that was made about specialty mental health services by the County Mental Health Plan or a particular provider. The [form to start a grievance or request an appeal \(PDF\)](#) can be filled out and mailed, faxed or emailed, or it can be completed through a phone conversation with DHHS-BH staff.

Submitting the form:

Mail: QI Coordinator, DHHS Behavioral Health, 720 Wood St., Eureka, CA 95501

Call: 707-268-2955, option 3 **Fax:** 707-476-4096 **Email:** MHB-QI_QA@co.humboldt.ca.us

When QI receives a grievance or appeal, QI lets the client know they've received it within 5 business days, and BH has a timeframe in which to address the grievance (90 days) or resolve the appeal (60 days). If the client was denied services and appeals it, they have the right to request continued services until the appeal is completed. [Guide to the Grievance and Appeal Process \(PDF\)](#).

The Medi-Cal Managed Care and Mental Health Office of the Ombudsman

The state Office of the Ombudsman helps solve problems from a neutral standpoint to ensure that Medi-Cal recipients receive all medically necessary covered services for which county plans are responsible. The Mental Health Ombudsman is designed to create a bridge between the County Mental Health Plan system and individuals, family members and friends of individuals, in need of mental health services by providing information and assistance in navigating through the system. You may contact the Department of Health Care Services, Office of the Ombudsman, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (excluding holidays), by phone at (888) 452-8609 or by e-mail at MMCDOmbudsmanOffice@dhcs.ca.gov. Please note: e-mail messages are not considered confidential. Personal information should not be included in an e-mail message.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I change my provider?

A client can request to change a provider by completing the [“Request for Change of Provider” form \(PDF\)](#). DHHS-BH does its best to honor these requests because DHHS-BH wants people to be comfortable with the person they are working with.

What if my concern isn't with a provider, it's about something else?

You can call QI, use the client problem resolution request form, use the comment card or file a grievance, and QI will ensure the feedback gets to the right place, whether the concern is about parking, room temperature or what's on the bulletin board in the waiting room.

Humboldt is a rural county and getting to Eureka is difficult, are there other options?

Yes. One option is to talk to your provider about telehealth or regionally based services. If you need assistance with transportation, contact your managed care plan, Partnership HealthPlan, at (800) 809-1350 for information and assistance.

Why can't DHHS-BH give me information about my loved one?

Confidentiality rules can feel limiting, and confidential information must be protected. However, friends and family are able to pass on information to DHHS-BH. This can be especially helpful when the client is in acute crisis and can't reliably relay information on their own behalf. DHHS-BH can't share confidential client information, or even acknowledge the individual is a patient, without a release of information (ROI). It may be frustrating, but Behavioral Health staff does not have the option to violate a client's confidentiality; it's unethical and unlawful. To get an ROI signed by your loved one, you can ask staff to make the request on your behalf, or you can discuss with your loved one directly. Download the [Release of Information Form \(PDF\)](#) or ask a staff member to print one out for you. Even without an ROI in place, you are still able to ask questions that can be answered in generalities, for instance, “If a client needed to refill a prescription urgently, who would they contact if they had already tried to reach their provider?”

Other Resources

- [“The Beneficiary Handbook” \(PDF\) has a lot of information for clients](#) including information on other types of complaints, such as civil rights complaints, as well.