

North Los Angeles County Regional Center
Vendor Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 5, 2022

Present: Committee Members

Sharoll Jackson (Chair), Jodi Agnew-Navarro, Orli Almog, Erica Beall, Kimberly Bermudez, Suad Bisogno, Catherine Carpenter, Cal Enriquez, Bob Erio, Kenny Ha, Dana Kalek, Alex Kopilevich, Don Lucas, Jenni Moran, Daniel Ortiz, Kevin Shields, & Nick Vukotic

Staff Members

Kimberly Johnson McNeill, Arpi Arabian, Stephanie Margaret, Dr. Michael Fernandez, Fred Rockwood, Cathy Robinson, Jennifer Williamson, Liliana Windover, Alan Darby, Omar Gonzalez, Natalia Langarica, Gabriela Eshrati, Marlene Vargas, Robert Dhondrup, Elisa Hill, Nancy Salyers, Silvia Haro, and Maria De Jesus Rodriguez

Dolly Sharma -Minutes Services and approximately 80 Service Providers- **Guests**

Absent: Kenny Ha

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Sharoll Jackson called the meeting to order at 9:32 am.

Following the Legislative Report portion of the agenda, Dr. Michael Fernandez introduced Maria de Jesus Rodriguez as the new Parent and Family Support Specialist at NLACRC. Since April, Maria joined Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Belonging Unit at the Chatsworth location. Maria will also support the Santa Clarita Valley Office. Before joining the Unit, Maria worked as an Early Start Bilingual Consumer Services Coordinator. Before joining NLACRC, Maria worked for the Youth Policy Institute as an Early Learning Network Manager. Maria has a B.S. in Child Development from California State University Northridge.

Dr. Fernandez also announced that Cynthia Sanchez, another Parent and Family Support Specialist, will start on May 9th from the Antelope Valley office. Before joining NLACRC, Cynthia has spent four years as a Case Manager at the Child & Family Guidance Center and a Case Worker at the Asian Youth Center. Cynthia has a degree in Criminal Justice from Westwood College and is a parent to a consumer served by NLACRC.

The Parent and Family Support Specialists can be reached Monday- Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

II. Public Input

Leticia Garcia, President of the NLACRC Board of Trustees, expressed thanks to the Committee and staff members. The last two years of overcoming challenges and new directives during a pandemic have been difficult. Leticia noted that the workers are the boots on the organization's ground, and the hard work has not gone unnoticed. As rate increases are being implemented, Leticia shared that service provider staff wages are an important issue to the board and hopes that rate increases will be beneficial for service provider Staff. She also shared, on behalf of the board, looking forward to a continued partnership in serving individuals in the community.

Victoria Berrey from the Family Focus Resource Center shared some of their upcoming May events. There will be 2 Bullying Prevention Workshops in Spanish on May 12th and English on May 19th. In addition, there are monthly workshops on IEP training, IEP Basics, and Advanced IEPs in both English and Spanish. In April, The Family Focus Resource center kicked off multiple in-person school fairs and held an event in Santa Clarita. Every fall, there is a Resource Fair, and the organization is currently looking for locations to host this event.

Lisa Williamsen from Partners for Potential wanted to inquire about the termination of alternative services rates as of June 1st. Ruth Janka stated that alternative services and the rate for alternative services will continue until NLACRC receives notice from DDS of a change; and also stated that any future changes will be relayed via official NLACRC communication. Stephanie Margaret agreed that there are currently no plans for changes to alternative services or alternative service rates. Multiple guests stated that they were getting conflicting information from Service Coordinators.

Ruth informed the VAC that services were in the process of being reviewed as part of “rollover” and that changes to services will be made as a result of assessment. Any services that cannot be assessed prior to May 31st will be extended to July 31.

Lisa Williamsen stated that the miscommunication was further fueled by a sister Regional Centers ending alternative services at the end of May. Ruth pointed out that ending alternative services, at this time, is not a DDS requirement; a regional center can make an independent decision regarding alternative services in their catchment area.

Alex Kopilevich expressed appreciation to the service coordinators who have responded to all his calls, emails, and requests, especially the School Age units and supervisors, for their help.

III. Consent Items

A. Approval of Agenda – (Page 2)

M/S/C (J. Moran/E. Beall) To approve the agenda as presented. The agenda was approved.

B. Approval of Minutes of April 7th Meeting – (Page 4)

M/S/C (S. Bisogno/K. Shields) To approve the revised April 7th Meeting Minutes. The Minutes were approved.

IV. Executive Director's Report – Ruth Janka

A. COVID Updates

COVID-19 metrics are trending down in current hospitalizations, although positivity rates are increasing. L.A. County Public Health has terminated the universal masking requirement for school and childcare settings. However, masking requirements will continue indoors for public transit, healthcare settings, correctional facilities, and shelters. Service Provider Sites are considered healthcare settings and must continue masking standards. NLACRC Service Provider staff members, under the health order, are expected to continue to mask. NLACRC Business offices with no contact with the community do not fall under the "healthcare setting" requirement. DDS issued a new directive related to former directives that extend waivers. Those expiration dates go into late May and early June of 2022. Of note, Regional Centers can no longer make individuals presumptively eligible.

B. School Transition Liaison

All Regional Centers state-wide will implement a 12-month School Transition Liaison to support the transition from Early Start to School Services. Liaisons will work on collaborative partnerships, promote inclusive options for consumers transitioning to pre-school, assist in developing materials to improve the transition process, and have regular coordination calls with DDS. This position will not carry cases.

C. Language Access and Cultural Competency Plan

Regional Centers will be submitting a Language Access and Cultural Competency Plan. The 1st plan is due June 15th. This plan aims to identify documents that would be translated in the various languages of the area. Also, identifying orientations that should be provided in multiple languages and held numerous times to meet the community's needs and conduct regular and periodic language assessments. Also, this plan will entail the coordination of interpretation and translation services and quality control measures to ensure the translations' availability, accuracy, readability, and cultural appropriateness. Finally, plan has to include a Language and Cultural Profile of our community.

D. Cultural Competency Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative

A final draft of the Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity policy is going before the Board. It includes acknowledgments of social inequity and has Vision and Mission Statements, definitions, purpose, policy objectives and professional staff conduct, recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention, disciplinary and remedial actions, etc.

E. IHSS Advocacy Assistance

There has been feedback from the community that there are challenges in obtaining the

appropriate number of IHSS hours for the individuals we serve. Several factors, including inadequate assessments, cause these issues. NLACRC has reached out to the Clients' Rights Advocate to assess if they too are receiving issues re: IHSS services. Lastly, vendors interested in providing IHSS advocacy assistance as a service were asked to please reach out to Community Services.

F. Staffing

NLACRC currently has 685 authorized physicians and 613 filled. There are 30 vacant positions. Positions have been opening in the last three months to address the caseload ratio and will be bringing on more. As we continue recruiting and training new Service Coordinators, there will be a learning curve. Communication and collaboration will be essential for everyone. There will be structuring for Lead Service Coordinators to help support the Onboarding of new Service Coordinators. Contact lists were sent to providers and will be continuously updated with phone and email information for Case Management, Community Services, and applicable Accounting departments.

G. Town Halls

Town Hall was held on April 6th on Social Recreation and Non-Medical Therapies. Service standards are on the website regarding the process for accessing these services. Requests have been put out for vendors for those services; those interested can contact Community Services.

The next Town Hall will be on May 19, 2022, at 1:30 p.m. The topic is How to Prepare for IPP and IFSP Meetings. Presenters include Gabriela Eshrati and Cristina Preuss, Community Services Directors.

V. Chief Financial Officer's Report – Alan Darby

NLACRC's total expenses for the month of March 2022 were \$55.8 million. That is made up of POS expenses of \$49.7 million, and Operations expenses of \$6 million.

Total YTD expenses – that's July 1 ,2021-March 21,2022 - were \$471.7 million. POS of \$428.1 million and Operations of \$43.5 million.

NLA's projected expenses for this year are expected to be \$688.5 million – with a POS of \$621 million, and OPS of \$67.5 million. We are expecting a surplus at the end of this fiscal year, of just under \$40 million. In total, all 21 Regional Centers expect a surplus of \$845 million. NLA is currently ranked 12 of all 21 centers for surplus.

Additional check runs are scheduled on Thursday, May 26th, and Wednesday, June 22nd. Alan will provide updates at next month's meeting.

NLACRC 990 Tax Return Form was reviewed and approved by the Board at the April meeting; the form is available on the Center's website.

Rate Reform Implementation Update – Accounting has uploaded the new rates effective April 1, 2022, for Batches 1, 2, 3, and 4. Vendors can see new rates on e-billing invoices. Accounting is working on issues regarding individual rates. Vendors who had incorrect rates when batches were received are actively being resolved. Please reach out to Alan for any questions.

DDS has awarded \$284,109 to each of the 21 Regional Centers to support HCBS Final Rule' Compliance. DDS is requiring a finalized plan be submitted by August 30, 2022. The funds for this must be encumbered by September 30, 2022. NLA is forming a workgroup to develop the plan and is looking for volunteers from the VAC to join. Evelyn McOmie, NLA's Community Services Director, will be the point person. The Center would like to move forward as soon as possible – within the next month or so – if anyone is interested in joining the workgroup, please email Evelyn and/or Alan Darby.

VI. Deputy Director's Report – Gabriela Eshrati

A. Camp Social Recreation Educational Services and Non-Medical Therapy Services Update

Staff is fully trained in the Planning Process for Camp Social Recreation and Non-Medical Therapies. Training took place through a formal process from Dr. Weller. The Town Hall on April 21st had over 100 people in attendance. The Q&A Session was extended to accommodate the interest, were able to answer most questions and have an informative meeting.

Requests for Vendorizations (RFV) are issued explicitly for Music Therapists, Recreational Therapists, Camp Services, Specialized Recreational Therapy, Social Recreational Programs, and Dance Therapy. So far, five proposals have been received, including a proposal for the Miracle Project, an overnight camp, Social Skills Horseback Riding, and Therapeutic Horsemanship. In addition, the City of Palmdale also expressed interest in developing recreational programs, specifically a non-medical therapy such as Art, Dance, and Music Therapy

B. Self-Determination Program

There have been 103 transitions into the program with signed IPPs, completed spending plans, and FMS Services, and 471 individuals have completed Orientation since the program became available. There have been 123 Certified Budgets, and an additional 18 are in progress. There have been 103 approved Spending Plans, with a further 20 in progress. Additional funds have been afforded for 3 Program Choice Specialists, one position has been

filled, and recruitment is ongoing for the remaining two positions.

Monthly Self-Determination Support groups are being held on the first Wednesday of every month and are facilitated by the L.A. Autism Society, a contractor that supports SDP implementation.

Self-Determination Local Advisory Committee Meeting was canceled for April 21st, but an in-person meeting will be held on May 19th at the San Fernando Valley office. The conference will take place from 7-9 p.m.

Meetings for Self-Determination Best Practices are with LVAC Members and DDS SDP representative Katie Hornberger-Munsley to discuss recommendations on increasing effectiveness and fully transitioning individuals into Self-Determination programs.

C. Enhanced Service Coordination Unit

The unit is currently in development; updates to follow as they become available.

D. On-Duty Call Center

The Call Center is fully operational with one supervisor and four San Fernando Valley Office specialists. Anyone who needs the Officer of the Day to contact the receptionist and ask to be transferred to the "Duty Specialist," hoping to have these calls answered live.

VII. Community Services Director's Report – Kimberly Johnson McNeil & Stephanie Margret

A. General Announcements

PPE for Providers will continue to be provided by NLACRC. In addition, residential Facilities will continue to receive PPE via transportation agencies at regularly scheduled intervals. All other Providers can request PPE by contacting Community Services Executive Assistant David Ramos by email at: dramos@nlacrc.org.

Virtual Clients' Rights Training is scheduled on June 6th, 2022, at 10 a.m., hosted by the Quality Assurance Team. Presenters will include Stephanie Hugh, NLACRC Clients' Rights Advocate, and William Wood, NLACRC Community Services Specialist. Registration opens May 11th, 2022, at noon and is available through Eventbrite. This presentation provides NLACRC Vendors information on the Office of Clients' Rights and how to be a better advocate and will count towards 2 hours of Continuing Education credits. More information can be found on News You Can Use.

PIN 22-14 was released by Community Care Licensing. A CCL Informational call was held on April 20th, 2022, regarding COVID-19 Requirements and providing updates on variants, vaccination requirements, and infection control for Staff. The PowerPoint referenced in the call is still available for review on the CCL Website. PIN 22-13 was released by Community Care Licensing; this included Infection Control Requirements and updates to existing

Infection Control Prevention Standards and information that indicated that it is easily accessible for anyone who would like to review it. This information can also be found on the CCL website.

HCBS Compliance – DDS continues to work with each Regional Center to ensure compliance with the CMS HCBS Final Rule. Compliance is needed fully by March 2023. DDS has provided each Regional Center with a report based on HCBS Provider Self-Assessments conducted through OIG and the virtual site assessments conducted by PCG. Information from Vendors who are new or did not have access at that time is still pending. NLACRC is required to post the information indicated by DDS.

The Community Services Department had noticed that many vendors identified themselves as inpatient institutions when they did not fall into that category per HCBS. Therefore, any Vendors who are not in compliance will be identified and contacted by Community Services staff to ensure accuracy before posting the report.

Resource Development – RFPs include announcements for three projects, including 2 Specialist Residential Facilities; both facilities will be 4-beds for males with a start-up funding amount of \$200,000 each. The 3rd project is a local Mental-Health Clinic with a start-up funding amount of \$150,000. All three projects have a projected deadline for submission of May 11th, 2022.

Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) – The Community Services Team is creating a 1-page addendum that will be rolled out to update program designs for individuals who are required to enact the EVV. More information will be sent out through correspondence from Community Service Specialists. In addition, the EVV Team is hosting open office hours on May 12th at 5:30 p.m. and May 17th at 2:00 p.m. This month's topic is Validating and Maintaining Provider I.D.s and Cal EVV.

Provisional Eligibility Program (PEP) – Developmental Services Bill AB136 expands eligibility for developmental disability services by allowing 3 or 4 years old to be provisionally eligible for Regional Center services under specific conditions. In addition, the Community Services Department will roll out a 1-page addendum to update program designs for providers interested and approved to provide these services. More information will be discussed at the Early Start Interagency Meeting on May 19th.

HCBS Compliance Funding – DDS stated that of the 15-million-dollar amount allocated to Regional Centers for the 2021-22 budget, only \$9,330,692 was awarded to projects. The remaining amount will be split amongst the Regional Centers, totaling \$284,100 each, and identify projects to support broader HCBS community compliance. Priorities for this funding include developing lower communities of practice to increase knowledge and implementation of best practices and encouraging collaborative groups. NLACRC plans for the funds will be reported to DDS by August 31st, 2022.

Vendor Maintenance Updates – Stephanie Margret

Stephanie asked Vendors to submit Annual Insurance Renewals, Professional Licenses, and current Organizational Charts to contract&compliance@nlacrc.org. In regard to Ownership Disclosure Statements, 1,029 forms have been received so far; 600 more are needed.

Staff Contact List – Stephanie Margret

A new process is being developed to distribute a current list of all Case Management, Accounting, and Community Services Staff to the Vendor/Provider Community 3 times per year. The next update is projected to go out in June.

CIE and PIP Contact – Stephanie Margret

Employment Specialist, Norma Martin. Providers who need technical support regarding current CIE, PIP incentives, or internship funding can follow up with Norma. In addition, program Design Addendum submissions can be sent to the Research Development Team.

B. Rate Reform – Stephanie Margret

As Alan mentioned, the rate changes will be reflected on April billing. Any errors or questions can be referred to contract&compliance@nlacrc.org. Community Service Team emails from Dropbox will be sent from "no-reply@dropbox.com." The subject will be the name of the Staff Member and "CommServ," followed by your Vendor Number. These are the identifying factors of an authentic Dropbox Email from NLACRC. The Dropbox files will be shared with the provider's email on file with NLACRC; this is not always the email associated with their billing. Please email Contract and Compliance for any login issues or questions.

Stephanie demonstrated the Rate Calculation Excel Spreadsheet beginning with the three tabs:

- Unbundled Amounts- Unbundled amounts refer to ancillary charges such as transportation reimbursement or mileage.
- Rates- The Rates tab refers to the subcode and current rate.
- Rate Models.

The sheet will automatically open the Unbundled Amount tab. Scrolling to the right of this page will show columns for the March 2022 rate and the rate increase percentage amount. The scope of the data is enormous, and any errors that are noticed can be sent to Contract & Compliance.

The rate recalculation takes the March 2022 rate and is divided by average hours per unit to get a Converted Hourly Rate. The Converted Hourly rate is then compared to the Benchmark Rate (weighted average). The Benchmark rate is then given the rate increase percentage to determine the new rate. Therefore, any March 2022 rate that exceeds the Benchmark rate for 2025 will not get a rate increase. However, there will be no decrease rates until July 2026 to meet the benchmark rate.

The Excel worksheet will be available for download. Stephanie also pointed out that any instance of "D.M." next to a subcode refers to the daily rate, not hourly.

Timelines for Subcodes under Batches 1-4:

Batch 1: Service Codes 091, 109, 111, and 680 are complete. Service Code 062 is in-progress, pending upload to Dropbox. Service Codes 520, 952, and 954 are DDS set rates, and the rate letter timeline is TBD. Excel calculation is only available on Dropbox. The pending calculation for Service Code 950.

Batch 2: Subcodes 055 and 063 are in-progress, pending upload to Dropbox. Subcodes 505, 510, and 515 are DDS set rates; the rate letter timeline is TBD. Excel calculation is only available on Dropbox.

Batch 3: Service Codes 108, 115, 117, 605, 862, 880, and 896 are next in-progress, pending upload to Dropbox. Service Code 805 is a DDS set rate; the rate letter timeline is TBD. Excel calculation is only available on Dropbox. The pending calculation for Service Codes 875, 882, and 883.

Batch 4: Service Codes 612, 615, and 620 are next in-progress, pending upload to Dropbox. Service Code 475 is a DDS set rate; the rate letter timeline is TBD. Excel calculation is only available on Dropbox. The pending calculation for Service Codes 113, 900, 901, and 904.

VIII. Legislative Report – Michelle Heid

Michelle gave a concise overview of the Legislative Report's contents. She stated that the Legal Team is awaiting the May revision of the Legislative Report, which is projected to be completed around May 11th. The report includes Trailer Bill language releases, budget change proposals, and links and summaries of recent legislative hearings and re-districting information. The report also contains summaries of all Stakeholder events and a list of future meetings.

IX. Committee Business

A. Funding to Support Compliance with the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Final Rule – Alan Darby (Page 11)

DDS has awarded \$284,109 to each of the 21 Regional Centers to support the HCBS Final Rule. A finalized plan must be submitted by August 30, 2022, and funds must be encumbered by September 30, 2022. NLACRC asks for volunteers from the Committee to form a workgroup to help develop this plan. Anyone interested can contact Alan or Evelyn McOmie for more information at emcomie@nlacrc.org.

B. Nominations for Board Designee/VAC Chair – Ruth Janka stated that we currently have 1 Provider, Suad Bisogno, nominated. Sharoll opened the floor for any more nominees, and there were none.

M/S/C (A. Kopilevich/E. Beall) To approve Suad Bisogno as the VAC Chair/Board Designee.

C. Jynny Retzinger Award Update – Ruth Janka

Nominations will close at the end of business on May 6th, 2022. There are two nominations, and once nominating is closed, the ballots will be sent out to VAC Committee for voting, and the award will be presented at the June 2022 VAC Meeting.

D. Discussions for In-Person Meeting Options – Ruth Janka

Erica Beall suggests 2 VAC Meetings in a hybrid style that allows those who are comfortable to attend in-person and provides a time after the meeting for attendees to get together. Ruth also suggested having quarterly in-person/hybrid meetings and continuing the rest via Zoom. Committee members submitted their preferences in the chat, and Ruth asked Natalia or Liliana to notate the choice of each Committee Member. After the votes were counted, 7 Committee Members voted for two in-person meetings, one person who identified 2 or 3 meetings. Ruth suggested planning two in-person/hybrid meetings at the start of the next fiscal year.

E. Full Meeting and Break-Out Group Report Out Schedule – Sharoll Jackson

Sharoll asked for feedback on the frequency of the current report-out system. Items are currently submitted to the Committee every other month for discussion. Dana Kalek stated that the existing time frameworks are better, so the Committee has time to review the reports and consider questions and other ideas for topics; no dissensions were made, and the current time frame will remain.

F. System/Industry Issues – Per Ruth, this topic is listed on each meeting agenda as an open topic for input. Erica Beall stated that the biggest issue in the SLS Provider Group meeting remains the workforce crisis. Erica is asking for advocacy on every front to help Providers work through this issue.

X. Report on Board Committee Meetings

A. Administrative Affairs – Kevin Shields

In the Administrative Affairs Committee, it was noted that NLACRC would have a large surplus. Of course, there are many factors to consider, including rate increases, increases, expenses, etc. Still, the AAC has a renewed focus on seeing where these funds can be best allocated.

B. Board of Trustees – Sharoll Jackson

The Board recently heard a presentation on the Audited Financial Statements. There were no issues, and the audit was clean. The Board went through the approval of contracts, the Public Information Service Standards, the Executive Director Performance Evaluation process, and Public Policy Legislation.

C. Consumer Services – Sharoll Jackson

Highlights include the Self-Determination Program and how that is being handled. 98 spending plans have been approved, and 23 are in progress. 448 individuals completed Orientation.

- D. Government & Community Relations – Suad Bisogno/
Highlights from this meeting included an ARCA training video for the staff training toolkit and several grassroots visits with ARCA. Marketing and outreach are also being expanded into communities, sharing flyers with information for institutions and the general public. Also, the Committee chose several bills for consideration for the Subject Matter Expert Review Process in which the Center will research and determine a position (if any) on the bill.

- E. Nominating – Bob Erio
Slates of Candidates were finalized for recommendations to the Board. If and when approved, the nominees will be seated in July 2022.

- F. Strategic Planning – Orli Almog
Orli stated that Ruth covered most of the points related to the Strategic Planning Committee during the Executive Director's report.

XI. Board Meeting Agenda Items

The following items were identified for the Committee's section of the May 11th Board Meeting agenda:

- A. Minutes of the April 7th Meeting
- B. Minutes of the May 5th Meeting

XII. Announcements / Information Items / Public Input

- A. Next Meeting: Thursday, June 2nd at 9:30 a.m. (Break-Out Groups).

- B. Public Input

Jenni Moran concludes 12 years of service on the VAC. She wanted to thank the Committee and the Staff for their support during her tenure. Sharoll thanked Jenni for her hard work, energy, and zest for the Committee. Michelle Heid also expressed gratitude for Jenni's leadership and guidance. Finally, Erica Beall echoed the sentiments of the other members, specifically for Jenni's support with older adult specialist work and thanking Sharoll for her dedication to the VAC.

XIII. Committee Work Group Information

- A. **Early Start Services** (Dana Kalek)
July 21, 2022 9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
Contact: Dana Kalek – dkalek@cdikids.org

- B. **School Age Services** (Cal Enriquez)
June 7, 2022 at 9:30am – 10:30am
Contact: Cal Enriquez – cenriquez@accreditednursing.com
- C. **Adult Services** (Suad Bisogno & Erica Beall)
July 5th, 2022 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Contact: Suad Bisogno – suad@irioc.org

- D. **Legislative Issues and Advocacy** (Sharoll Jackson)

XIV. Adjournment

Sharoll Jackson, Committee Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:23 a.m.

Submitted by:

(*) *Natalia Langarica*
Executive Administrative Assistant

() The majority of these minutes are taken from the Minutes Service submission and reviewed/edited as presented herein by NLACRC staff.*