



LOS ANGELES COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMISSION

Retreat Report

510 S. Vermont Ave., 9th Floor (T Level), Los Angeles, CA 90020
September 11, 2025 | 10 am - 3 pm

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September 23, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles County Behavioral Health Commission (the Commission) partnered with Evoke Collective (Evoke) to design and facilitate its 2025 annual retreat. To prepare for the retreat, Evoke consultants conducted exploratory conversations with the Commission's Chair, 1st Vice Chair, and 2nd Vice Chair. These discussions shaped the retreat's purpose, goals, and design. The half-day retreat took place on September 11, 2025, at the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health building located at 510 South Vermont Avenue.

Of the 13 filled Commission seats, 9 Commissioners attended and participated in the retreat. Eight Commissioners participated as full retreat participants; and one Commissioner participated for the morning portion and departed after the lunch break. All 9 Commissioners contributed to the information included in this report.

The purpose of this report is to document the accomplishments, barriers, priorities, and action items elevated by the Commissioners during the retreat to support the effectiveness of the Commission and the implementation of its goals.

RETREAT PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

Purpose

Building and deepening relationship among Commissioners, connecting their "Why" to the Commission's mission, and committing to the Commission's priorities

Desired Outcomes

- Deeper understanding of how each Commissioner is connected to the Mission and their desired impact of their role on the communities they serve
- Celebrated any wins (big or small) since last summer (2024)
- Building accountability and clarity around next steps to achieve high-level priorities

Agenda

The retreat agenda was designed to guide the Commission through a series of collaborative discussions and activities aimed at building relationships and developing shared understanding of accountability with practical action items to address priorities.

1. Welcome from Commission Chair and Facilitator Introductions
2. Overview of Retreat Agenda
3. Retreat Norms

4. Commissioner's Why Connected to the Mission
5. Progress Since Last Retreat: Accomplishments, Barriers, & Priorities
6. Creating Shared Accountability
7. Next Steps & Retreat Closing

POST-RETREAT ACTION ITEMS FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

During the retreat, Commissioners celebrated accomplishments since the last retreat in August 2024, barriers to effectiveness, outlined key action items and support needed from the Executive Committee and Executive Assistant to ensure effective goal implementation and accountability.

Accomplishments Since Last Retreat

As a commission:

1. Held robust discussions about By Laws and Job Descriptions for new roles to strengthen the composition of the Commission (related to Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen the Commission for Greater Impact)
2. Thoughtfully onboarded partners at SAPC. There was excellent attendance and participation and filled a seat.
3. Held two town halls: SAPC and Care Court
4. Have supported hybrid and evening meetings when appropriate and available
5. Shared access to resources'

Individually:

1. In SD 4, had an opportunity to advance passion projects
2. In SD 2, developed and strengthened relationships with 3 district commissioners through regular connection and meetings
3. Chair: Feeling seen and heard through Partnerships
4. Opened a lot of doors to connect with community and connecting community members to each other through listening session with the LAC Youth Commission (supporting mental health for our young folks)
5. Data and understanding of issues improved and deepened (more inclusive)

Barriers & Proposed Solutions

The following barriers and corresponding solutions were captured from Commissioners' live responses to the retreat prompts. In the "Recommendations" section below, these areas have been prioritized and organized for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Barrier: Commission Lacks Representation of Key Community Member Identities and Voices

Proposed Solutions:

- Recruit a Black male commissioner
- Increase support for immigrant and Latino communities by ensuring that they are represented and address / discuss the impact of ICE raids on the community and the resulting trauma
- Discuss how transgender rights intersect with mental health and the role of behavioral health and the Commission in advocating for those communities

Barrier: Lack of Momentum, Accountability, and Sustained Action.

Proposed Solutions:

- Place one Commission priority on each agenda to focus on and decide upon (and distinguish between what we must do versus what we would like to do)
- At each meeting, hear from individual Commissioners about activities, tasks, and priorities each SD is championing.
- Celebrate and build on wins (find the bright spots and glean learnings / insights)
- Create an active subcommittee and abandon the current, inactive subcommittees
- Create a culture where it is OK to abandon ideas if they are not working (allow time for reflection and learning so that there is a different way of moving forward when something is not working)
- Plan for relationship building with key partners and stakeholders.
- Minutes: allow time for follow up on request requests and results, including when questions are answered in a meeting and allow for a correction to past minutes before adopting them.
- Strategically use each Commissioners time and capacity to contribute individually to certain WIC codes

Barrier: Lack of Shared Understanding of Minimum Contribution and Basic Expectations of the Role of Commissioner.

Proposed Solutions:

- Develop basic expectations, deliverables, and responsibilities for the Commissioner role.
- Develop cultural ethos (i.e. rules of engagement or group norms).
- Revisit the WIC and ensure that all Commissioners fully understand what is expected of them in carrying out state mandates.
- Ensure equity and clarity across all five Supervisorial Districts and Commissioners.
- Define the purpose of the Executive Committee and agenda setting

Barrier: Inconsistent Commissioner Attendance and / or Disengaged Participation

Proposed Solutions:

- Address virtual participation and make attending Commission meetings more accessible to those who cannot physically attend (i.e. offer zoom option)

- Compel Supervisors to appoint new Commissioners for those who are chronically absent and for vacancies.
- Create standing agenda item for free-flowing discussion and collective dialogue to move toward action/direction
- Create agendas that prioritize depth over breath (less reportouts and more time for collaborative work across the district)
- Invite speakers from specific departments and include Q&A (not just an informational download)
- Offer a brief recap of what has happened, what will happen and the reason or narrative.

Barrier: Lack of Quality Community Participation and Attendance

Proposed Solutions:

- Create more compelling agendas that include important decisions to be made and vital content (“form follows function”)
- Host more town halls (at least 2 per year)
- Consider the day, time and location of Commission meetings to increase attendance and participation
- Offer sign in sheets to track attendance and stakeholder representation
- Public comment. Make sure UCCS, SCCS, SALT present and participating and clearly address requests from public:
 - Be more sensitive to the allotted time for each public comment and offer deep listening to messages from the community, empathetically and respectfully responding (what are the mechanisms available that allow this to happen in practice?)

Barrier: High Volume of Information and Updates that Is Difficult to Track and Manage

Proposed Solutions:

- Create a “living document” or repository of all the updates, information, and decisions coming from the county that Commissioners must have access to including a DMH Employee Directory and their role to the Commission
- Set up and use a behavioral health commission email address when communicating with commissioners to ensure that items are opened
- Hear and educate each other on consequences of shifts to BHC.

Barrier: Lack of Collaborative Relationship with DMH

Proposed Solutions:

- Request that DMH include the Commission (or a representative Commissioner) in the decision making process from ideation through decision to provide thoughtful and proactive input.
- Assign a Commissioner to develop a closer more collaborative relationship with the Director of DMH.
- Change the By Laws to require that the chair and vice-chairs meet with the director of DMH
- Collaborate with DMH to improve the website so that appropriate resources for specific service areas are easy to find.

Accountability: Creating A Framework

Who are we accountable to?

- Ourselves
- Our respective districts
- Those who are or will be in need of services (within Los Angeles)
- Each other (current and newly appointed Commissioners)
 - Time
 - Need relationship building among district appointees
 - Clarify and state expectations (time, experience, history of commission is respected)
 - Need to outline rules of engagement, including agendas, time blocking/run of show for internal agenda, sharing time, boundaries, mechanism to act collectively (like how to regularly sit and sit on SCs and determine how to spend our discretion)
 - Agenda and report on progress (each commissioner would share what they are actively working on or progress since last meeting)
 - Offer accountability to the public by inviting the press to attend commission meetings
- Our respective supervisors to advise BOS
- DMH
 - Accountability is a mutual endeavor.
 - DMH is not accountable to BHC (we do not have oversight)
 - Would like deeper collaboration with DMH and to see DMH as dependable for outreach and relationships
 - Partnership that is resourced by staff.
 - DMH responsible and respectful to commissioners.
 - Sitting with the commission, consistent attendance, demonstrating presence and respect

Recommendations (or Strategically Aligned Priorities)

The following recommendations are offered within the context of the barriers, proposed solutions, and priorities identified by Commissioners during the retreat. They are intended to guide and support the Executive Committee and Commissioners in determining immediate steps following this retreat. The first two recommendations are presented as foundational priorities that may be established first, followed by a set of additional considerations offered as potential areas of focus for the Commission's next collective efforts.

Foundational Priority #1: Establish Rules of Engagement and Shared Expectations

- Collaboratively develop a set of norms or "rules of engagement" that clarify the expectations, responsibilities, and minimum contributions for Commissioners.
- Revisit the WIC mandates together to ensure a shared understanding of the Commission's purpose, obligations, and discretionary power.
- Define the role of the Executive Committee, including how agendas are set, how decisions are communicated, and how the Executive Committee will support Commissioners and ensure accountability.
- Create avenues for Commissioners to make requests, when appropriate, of the DMH staff supporting the Commission - including suggestions around Minute structure and content

Foundational Priority #2: Redesign the Commission's Regular Meeting Agenda

- Redesign agendas to prioritize depth over breadth - creating time for discussion, problem-solving, and identifying areas for potential collaboration among Commissioners.
- Include structured moments for progress check-ins on action items - setting time on each agenda for Commissioners to update the Commission on their priorities as Commissioners as well as the priorities set by their Supervisorial Districts.
- Build in time to celebrate wins, reflect on lessons learned, strengthen relationships, and provide space for open dialogue.
- Consider how the public comment portion of the meeting may be restructured to enhance community engagement, connection, and advocacy efforts.

Once these foundational priorities are in place, the Executive Committee may wish to identify one or two of the following areas to guide where the Commission focuses its collective energy.

Potential Focus Area: Strengthen Relationships among Commissioners

- Actively encourage Commissioners to build relationships with other Commissioners assigned to their Supervisorial District.
- Consider dedicating agenda time or informal gatherings for district-based check-ins to foster communication and shared advocacy efforts.

Potential Focus Area: Strengthen Representation and Community Voice

- Continue efforts to recruit Commissioners from underrepresented communities, including Black male representation, immigrant voices, and individuals who can speak to the intersection of transgender rights and behavioral health.
- Ensure community input is integrated into Commission meetings and townhalls - identifying follow-up measures to public comments and concerns, increasing accessibility of meetings, ensuring meeting content is relevant and responsive to community priorities, and continuing to track attendance.

Potential Focus Area: Enhance Collaboration with DMH

- Assess whether additional Commissioners or members of the Executive Committee could share responsibility for engaging with DMH leadership alongside the Chair, to support more regular, open communication and deepen trust with DMH.
- Encourage DMH's regular participation and presence at Commission meetings, and create structured opportunities for two-way exchange - including DMH updates, Commissioner input on emerging Department priorities, and sharing the Commission's areas of focus.
- Initiate a conversation with DMH leadership to explore where collaboration, trust-building, and information-sharing can better support shared priorities for serving the community.
- Open a dialogue with DMH to align on expectations for partnership, including communication, presence, mutual respect, and the types of staff support that can facilitate collaboration.