

Online Resource 1

Patient and Family Perspectives on Accessing and Continuing Behavioral Health Services: A Qualitative Investigation

Community Mental Health Journal

Semi-structured focus group and interview guide for MassHealth members (English)

Semi-structured Focus Group / Interview Guide for MassHealth Members

OPENING STATEMENT

My name is _____ and I work at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School and will be asking interview questions alongside _____ who is part of our team. (If you are a psychologist yourself, disclose that to group now)

We appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today.

PURPOSE

The goal of today's focus group is to help the Office of Behavioral Health at MassHealth better understand how members (i.e., patients with MassHealth insurance) begin and stay in treatment for mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders. MassHealth is another name for the state's Medicaid program. The information collected will be summarized into a report and shared with MassHealth to bring attention to barriers, patient's attitudes, and successes to delivering behavioral health treatment. We will not share your name or identifying information with MassHealth.

LOGISTICS

For today's discussion, we're planning approximately an hour to an hour and a half with a 5-minute break half-way-through. Before we get into the discussion, I'm just going to review a couple of Zoom logistics (**only use these instructions if a FG; not needed for a 1:1 interview**):

- We do ask that you mute yourself when not talking to minimize background noise (and don't forget to unmute yourself when you want to talk).
- You can use the chat box to ask any questions or make any comments – our team will be monitoring the chat box.

Also, to thank you for your time, you will receive a \$50 Bank of America gift card in the mail. **Please look out for a letter from Bank of America.**

CONFIDENTIALITY

We also want to highlight a couple of notes about confidentiality.

Before today's Zoom (**or phone**) meeting, you should have received a **project Fact Sheet** (Note: review Fact Sheet if needed) which is like a consent form for us to speak together. As indicated in this Fact Sheet, we intend to audio-record today's session with your permission. The purpose of recording is to help us accurately capture what everyone says (**if 1:1 – capture what you and I discuss – edit next**

sentence as well, if needed). We ask everyone to respect each other's privacy and **do not** share any information you hear in this discussion outside of today's meeting.

Again, the information we learn today and from other **focus groups and interviews** will be summarized and used to prepare a report for MassHealth. Your name and any other personally identifiable information will **NOT** be used or disclosed in the report. MassHealth will not know that you have participated in this FG/interview.

In a moment we will begin recording this meeting. By remaining on the call you are giving us consent to record.

FINAL REMARKS

Before we record, a few final notes. Your participation today is voluntary; you don't have to answer a question if you don't want to. And, you don't have to answer all the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. You may also stop or withdraw from the discussion at any time with no penalty. We want to hear as many viewpoints as possible and would like for everyone to contribute their thoughts. So, please help us make sure that everyone is getting a chance to speak if they want to. There may be times that we need to interrupt the conversation just to make sure we get through all the questions and hear everyone's perspectives, so I want to apologize ahead of time if that happens.

Are there any questions before we begin? [**Pause and answer as needed**]

I'm going to begin recording now.

QUESTIONS

[Icebreaking and Background Questions]

Today we will be asking you about "behavioral health services". Some people refer to these services as "mental health treatment" or "substance use treatment." Typically, this care is delivered by one of the following types of providers: a psychiatrist, or psychiatric nurse practitioner, a clinical social worker, or a clinical psychologist. Some patients may also have some of these discussions with their primary care provider. Some people may simply refer to their provider as a "counselor" or a "therapist." While we recognize that many people receiving behavioral health care also have medical or physical health problems, today we are focused on understanding more about the *behavioral health care you receive, not your medical care*.

- 1) First, I'd like to ask for you to introduce yourself (first name only) and share how long you've been receiving behavioral health treatment and your experience in receiving this treatment. For example, you've been seeing a therapist in their office for the past 2 years; or you've spent time overnight in a hospital for behavioral health or substance use; etc. Would someone like to volunteer to start?

[Main Questions]

We'd like to ask about your experiences with using behavioral health services for the first time.

- 2) How did you get into treatment for your mental health and/or substance use disorder?

- 3) If someone referred you to behavioral health treatment and/or services, who was that person?
 - a. Was it your primary care physician/doctor or someone else?
 - b. How did they refer you? For example, did they give you a name and/or phone number to call?
- 4) How would you describe your initial experience(s) with beginning behavioral health treatment?
 - a. Was it positive? How so?
 - b. Was it negative or not what you expected? Why?
 - c. Did things happen quickly or take a lot of time?
 - d. How did you feel after the first few visits? Did anything change or get better/worse?
- 5) Did the behavioral health provider you were meeting with communicate with other health care providers of yours? How did they communicate?
- 6) Did the provider work to include your family in your care? In what way were they included in your care?
- 7) Do you have a preference for a behavioral health provider who speaks a language other than English?
- 8) For my next question, let me start with some examples. Sometimes, people want to have a provider who is similar to them in some way: such as.... if someone is Hispanic, that person might have a preference for a provider who is also Hispanic. Or, someone who is gay may want a counselor who is gay. Have you had a provider who was different from your preference? Was that an issue for you? What factors of a counselor's identity are important to you in terms of culture, race, ethnicity or sexual identity?

Next, we'd like to ask about your experiences with continuing to receive behavioral health treatment.

- 9) Can you describe anything that has made it difficult for you to continue to receive behavioral health treatment?
 - a. (**Note: Only probe if there's no response; give a few examples**) Barriers to access might include unreliable transportation, unaffordable health care costs, long wait times, insufficient support from health care staff, difficulty with technology, stigma, among others.
 - b. Can you describe any times you didn't or couldn't get to appointments (**Note: Only probe if there's no response**; e.g., transportation, scheduling issues, costs, family priorities)?
- 10) Have there been times you didn't want to go back to a behavioral health provider, or If you met with a behavioral health provider once or twice and then decided not to continue treatment, please explain why.
- 11) What has scheduling appointments been like?
 - a. Are you able to find times that work for you/get to appointments?

- b. Have you participated in any telehealth visits over the past 12-18 months?
 - c. (Note: Only probe these three questions if there's no response).
 - i. What have telehealth visits been like?
 - ii. Have telehealth visits made anything easier about getting treatment?
 - iii. Have telehealth visits made treatment more challenging?
- 12) What would help you continue to receive behavioral health treatment?
- a. (Note: Only probe if there's no response; give a few examples) Somethings that might help or facilitate engagement include flexibility with scheduling and meeting, transportation accommodations, financial assistance or incentives, support from staff, support from friends and families, among others.
- 13) Thank you for your participation in this focus group; we've learned a lot! My final question is... How do your family and/or friends feel about your behavioral health treatment? (Note: The following questions are prompts if people aren't volunteering a lot; not necessarily expecting an answer to each one)
- a. How does your family/friends feel?
 - b. What was their reaction to you starting treatment?
 - c. How do they feel about you staying in treatment (If supportive, how are they supportive?)
 - d. How do you feel about sharing information about your behavioral health needs with others, like family or friends?
 - i. Are there situations where you think providers shouldn't share vs some situations where you think providers absolutely should share information with your family?
- 14) Is there anything else you would like to say before we close today's focus group?

CLOSING

Those are all the questions we have for you. Thank you for volunteering to share your experiences and perspectives with us! We really appreciate your time and input. If you have any additional comments or questions about our evaluation and would like to follow up with us, please feel free to reach out to me via email _____ or call _____.

Here is the link with a short form so that we can mail you the Bank of America gift card - we will also be sure to include it in an email. Again, please look out for a letter in the mail from Bank of America with your gift card. Thank you! It might take a few weeks for you to receive your gift card in the mail after the focus group.