

## **Coalition for a Safer ABQ**

City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Leaders,

We are writing to you as leaders of the Coalition for a Safer Albuquerque. We are concerned individuals, many of whom have decades of professional experience working with or for our community's most vulnerable citizens. Collectively, we have hundreds of professional years of experience advocating ways to improve how our local government uses our tax dollars to support marginalized persons such as, people with disabilities, substance dependence, those with severe mental health diagnosis, and/or who experience homelessness.

In December 2020 our coalition met with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Government Commission (ABCGC) and sent a letter that urged the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County to act jointly and to "attain technical assistance from veteran administrators who have experience in operating government-funded community-based behavioral health and social services. Services that are evidence-based and proven effective" and "Using that technical assistance, adopt and implement a Strategic Plan to identify the goals, objectives, and strategies necessary to accomplish those goals."

In response, the City and County contracted with Via Positiva to conduct a behavioral health gaps analysis. The gaps analysis identified services, systems and resources already in place and what is missing to have a full spectrum of behavioral health services for our community, so that all have the support to live with dignity. The city and county amended the final version. Subsequently, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County hosted zoom meetings with providers and community members to gather input on a potential joint City-County strategic planning process.

The strategic plan should be a tool to improve local behavioral health services, allowing local government to maximize resources and minimize duplication. While we appreciate the effort to bring stakeholders to the table in this strategic plan, a single, time limited, meeting is not enough for meaningful input and guidance from the professionals that are day to day on the ground, educated and trained to have the knowledge of the community members we all aim to serve. The City and County have attempted to respond to stakeholder requests but should not claim to have buy-in from community providers and administrators having displayed a near minimal effort. If there were on-going dialogue, and not just progress reports, where the community can help shape goals and objectives; monitor and evaluate, and ensure that the needs of the people in service are treated with unconditional positive regard, through a trauma informed lens, then we can whole-heartedly herald the City and County as having community input.

We understand the immense scope of this effort and as the City and County work together to build this strategic plan, the coalition is concerned that (1) there is no technical assistance from veteran administrators spoken of by City and County officials; and (2) stakeholder input has been extremely limited and entirely inadequate. Therefore, we strongly ask that you, (1) once again, obtain technical assistance, and (2) that you take the following steps for better engaging stakeholders, especially people with lived experience, and for strengthening the strategic planning.

**Create more meaningful input from the community before putting together a strategic plan.** We are grateful that you set up the two zoom meetings. However, we ask that you gather much more input from people with lived experience that have mental health, addictions, unstable or no shelter; and from residents who have experienced city and county programs. We urge you to go to the places where the people most impacted are and talk with them, seek their input. This can be done through meetings at direct service organizations, at shelters, peer run organizations, in the parks and streets or create a phone number where organizations can encourage clients to call and share thoughts.

- **Create more meaningful ways that service providers and administrators can give input.** Host at the very least, 2 more input meetings with providers, on evenings or weekends, so that more providers can give input. Where is all of the information and ideas gathered at those meetings now? How or was it utilized?
- **Create a feedback process.** Full transparency is needed. It is imperative that the county and city invest in a centralized way to receive feedback about programs that are working or that need improvement. Without this feedback it is impossible for the entities to best understand what they are excelling in and what needs support. A validated continuous quality model that is data rich, that has benchmarks, timelines, and identifies responsible persons.
- **Clarification on what is currently in progress and what is planned into the future.** During the presentations from the city and county, current and years into the future plans were lumped together as “current” and that was confusing to understand what actually is current and what is planned for the future. We would like more specifics on this.
- **MDC, the Metropolitan Detention Center, needs to be included in a strategic plan moving forward.** Tens of thousands of county and city residents move through the jail every year, and work to support stability of care inside and outside the jail needs to be part of investment from the city and county.
- **Consider how to blend funding sources.** By using state and federal dollars, local tax dollars can be used for services that are not usually covered by those programs, such as PREVENTION and RECOVERY.

We are requesting another meeting with City and County officials, and hope that the Behavioral Health Joint Strategic Plan found, <https://www.cabq.gov/family/news/city-of-albuquerque-bernalillo-county-system-gap-analysis>, is not the final version. We truly believe together we are stronger, more creative, and can finally change the trajectory of our future so that quality of life is improved for all people.

**Coalition for a Safer ABQ steering committee**

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