



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Health Services Agency

Subject: Appointment of Behavioral Health Director

Meeting Date: April 8, 2025

Formal Title: Approve appointment of Dr. Marni R. Sandoval as the Behavioral Health Director, effective May 5, 2025

Recommended Actions

Approve appointment of Dr. Marni R. Sandoval as the Behavioral Health Director, effective May 5, 2025.

Executive Summary

The Health Services Agency (HSA) requests that the Board approve the appointment of Dr. Marni R. Sandoval as the Behavioral Health Director of the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, effective May 5, 2025. Welfare and Institutions Code 5607 requires that the local governing body appoint a director of mental health services who shall carry out the powers and duties outlined in the Mental Health Act. With the Board's approval, Dr. Sandoval will serve in this capacity.

Discussion

The County of Santa Cruz's Behavioral Health Director position was recently vacated, effective January 31, 2025. Per California Code of Regulations, Title 9, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8, and Section 620.1, HSA requested approval by the California Department of Health Care Services to appoint Deputy Director Karen Kern as the Acting Behavioral Health Director for the County of Santa Cruz, beginning February 1, 2025. Thereafter the recruitment process to fill the vacancy with a permanent appointment was finalized. Per Santa Cruz County Code 2.104.050, the Mental Health Advisory Board was involved in the selection process. The appointment of Behavioral Health Director who shall carry out the powers and duties outlined in the Mental Health Act must be approved by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, per Welfare and Institutions Code 5607.

Dr. Sandoval is a Licensed Psychologist and holds a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Psychology from University of California, Davis, and a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Clinical Psychology and a Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) from California School of Professional Psychology in San Francisco.

Dr. Sandoval is a distinguished leader in the field of public behavioral health. With over 25 years of experience, she has played an instrumental role in shaping and oversight of behavioral health programs across Monterey County, California. As the Deputy Director of Behavioral Health for Monterey County Behavioral Health, Dr. Sandoval has overseen the administration, development, management, and service delivery of comprehensive mental health programs. Her expertise is widely recognized at the state level, where she serves as an advisor to agencies such as the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS).

Dr. Sandoval is deeply committed to integrating trauma-informed and culturally relevant approaches to mental health and substance use care, ensuring that children, youth, adults, and families receive equitable access to services. Her work involves extensive collaboration with local public agencies and community providers. While at Monterey County she has played a crucial role in implementing Medi-Cal plan responsibilities, CalAIM initiatives including payment reform efforts, and advocating for policies that support the well-being of underserved populations. She has contributed to the development of the state's behavioral health ecosystem through her work with Breaking Barriers California and the Child and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI), where she co-authored a state paper aimed at improving resource and service integration across agencies.

In addition to her administrative leadership, Dr. Sandoval has been dedicated to training and mentoring future mental health professionals. Since 2005, she has served as the Training Director for the American Psychological Association (APA) accredited Doctoral Psychology Internship and Practicum Program at Monterey County Behavioral Health. Her experience also extends to private practice, where she has provided specialized assessments for educational disabilities, learning differences, and trauma-related issues.

Her wealth of experience includes leadership in various aspects of behavioral health, high-level program management, budget oversight, grant and contract administration. Her work continues to have a profound impact on the landscape of behavioral health, reinforcing her commitment to building resilient communities and fostering the next generation of mental health professionals.

HSA is honored that Dr. Sandoval has chosen to continue her career path with the County of Santa Cruz. Her experience and wealth of knowledge in the behavioral health field will make her a great asset to the community.

Financial Impact

The Behavioral Health Director position is included in the HSA Behavioral Health Division's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Approved Budget and will be included in the FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget. No new County General Funds are needed nor requested.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety, Operational Excellence

Submitted By:

Monica Morales, Director of Health Services

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.