

## Justice in Action Mental Health Research Briefing 2024 Addendum

Since May of 2023, in addition to the resources referenced in our initial research briefing, two data sources have informed Justice in Action's continued work on mental health navigation:

1. The program design and evaluation of SolanoConnex
2. The report titled "Supporting Individuals with Mental Health and/or Addiction Issues Through Patient Navigation: A Scoping Review" by Jennifer N. Mullen, Anthony Levitt, and Roula Markoulakis in the *Community Mental Health Journal* was published June 1, 2022.

### SolanoConnex Summary

In May of 2023, the research team undertook the task of finding a mental health navigation model shown to work effectively within the United States healthcare system. This is how we learned about SolanoConnex, the mental health navigation system in Solano County, California.

This system was funded by the Solano County Board of Supervisors and implemented by a team from the public health department at Touro University California. SolanoConnex describes itself as a "multi-component intervention with three main parts. The **mobile-optimized web application** (solanoconnex.org) is an "access portal" to find locally available mental health resources. The information provided by the web app, which is also accessible through digital kiosks across Solano County, is curated or tailored based on a user's self-identified needs, sociodemographic characteristics, insurance status, and ethnolinguistic background. **Trained patient navigators** are available for users to speak with about their specific queries or to refer them to providers and services. **The outreach and education campaigns** were launched to reduce mental health stigma and increase awareness about the web application. SolanoConnex is meant to be a central repository of information of mental health services for Solano County residents and is part of a broader network of existing behavioral health resources and services." The program's total cost, including training and wages for navigators, web app hosting, and outreach campaigns, comes to \$301,660 annually.

What follows are key results from the first three-year pilot phase of SolanoConnex. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of mental health navigation in a public health setting.

#### *Patient navigators and referrals*

[Between November 1, 2021, and] June 30, 2023, 89 Solano County residents used patient navigators, 47 of which were at in-person outreach events. The most common questions or requests have been about a specific mental health disorder or challenge (i.e. depression), looking for mental health services for a child or family member, and services related to trauma and abuse. Patient navigators have conducted 174 follow-ups with callers.

#### *Web app*

In total, the web app has received over 30,204 visits since its launch or an average of 1,510 visits per month. The largest number of visits was recorded in November 2021(3,125), and the lowest was in April 2022 (830).

Most users sought resources for depression and anxiety (6.6%), followed by support groups and child behavioral concerns (1.8% each). A similar proportion of users sought resources for stress and anger, emotional support for parents, crisis numbers, loneliness and isolation, and grief counseling. Less than 1% of users explored resources for psychiatric help, pregnancy and mental health, emergency medical care, intimate partner violence, trauma, family violence, psychosis, elder abuse, and sexual violence.

#### *Mental Health Services Community Impact Data*

Monthly call data from the Solano County Behavioral Health Access line found that the call volume before the launch of SolanoConnex was 334 average monthly calls and after was 392 average monthly calls. A t-test analysis was performed and a statistically significant difference between before and after monthly call averages was found ( $p=0.016$ ). This data is not causal but provides insights into trends.

In collaboration with the NAMI organizations in Solano and Sonoma counties, Support Group attendance data was collected and compared data from the first year of the SolanoConnex Program and the second year. A difference-in-difference analysis was performed to determine if the rate of change in attendance was different between the two counties, one which is supported by SolanoConnex and the other which is not and may serve as a comparison group. It was found that while Sonoma County had greater overall attendance rates, the rates did not change much between the two time periods whereas there was a significant change in attendance rates in Solano County. While this is not causal data, this trend data suggests possible impacts the program is having on the community.<sup>1</sup>

#### **“Supporting Individuals with Mental Health and/or Addiction Issues Through Patient Navigation: A Scoping Review” Summary**

This review was conducted by an academic health sciences center librarian and a team of researchers who sought sources from five academic databases. Studies of fourteen Navigation programs were selected and reviewed. The question for this scoping review was: *What are the features and common underlying function of existing navigation services for individuals with Mental Health/Addiction (MHA) concerns?* They found core features of mental health and addiction navigator programs include barrier reduction, client-centered support, and the facilitation of integrated care. Researchers concluded that “Mental health and Addiction navigation (less than a decade old), is emerging as a potentially important and necessary model for providing flexible and adaptable support to individuals facing multiple barriers to care in complex and fragmented mental health and addiction systems.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Final Evaluation of SolanoConnex: Preliminary Results*. Prepared by Anton L.V. Avancena. The University of Texas at Austin with contributions from Carinne Brody, Valentina Kelly, and Deirdra Wilson of Touro University California.

<sup>2</sup> “Supporting Individuals with Mental Health and/or Addiction Issues Through Patient Navigation: A Scoping Review.” Jennifer N. Mullen, Anthony Levitt, and Roula Markoulakis. *Community Mental Health Journal*. June 1, 2022