

VMRC FY 2021-2022 Annual Report: Disparity and Equity in Expenditures Meetings

VMRC conducted one Purchase of Service (POS) Disparity and Equity in Expenditures public meeting. The meeting was held Hybrid in a Webinar format. Interpretation was provided in English and Spanish; two interpreters were utilized, one for the Webinar and one in person with close captioning. The meeting was held on March 29, 2023, from 2 pm to 6 pm. The idea of having one meeting and doing it in this timeframe was to give flexible time for anybody between these hours to make a public comment. It was also important to allow the different Community Base Organizations we are collaborating time between presentations and public comments to present and give information about their project. We started at 2 pm with an English presentation, and at 4 pm, with a Spanish presentation on our POS expenditures. Between both presentations, we allowed time for CBOs to present on their projects and had the opportunity for attendees or Webinar participants to make public comments. At 2:50 pm, we had 45 attendees on the Webinar and 18 people in person for our final webinar report, we had a total of 81 attendees. Before having the public meeting, we met with the different Parent groups that we are currently collaborating with to get feedback on what are the concerns that the community is having. Based on the feedback from some community members, having this format would allow more people to participate. Since one of our largest populations is Hispanic, we need to have Interpretation in Spanish and allow individuals to request additional Interpretation if needed. Closed Captioning was provided during the meeting. Notice of the meeting was published on the VMRC website on February 10, 2023. The flyer was also published on our social media (Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, and Instagram) and in the weekly newsletter of VMRC. The flyer was also shared with the Community Base Organization, Stakeholders, and Parent Groups collaborating with VMRC. The stakeholders that attended the meeting were SCDD (North Valley Hills Office), FRN (Family Resource Network), and DRC (Disability Rights of California). We had a total of 4 CBOs present during the meeting. Attached is the agenda for the public meeting.

Challenges:

One of the components noted continues to be the inability to break down the ethnic group "other" in an understandable way due to the categories limited to the CDER and SANDIS groupings in place. When looking at our data continues to show a difference when comparing languages regarding disparity rather than only ethnicity. The information provided to our consumers, families, and community members was essential. We worked hard to help families better understand the services VMRC offers and how the services are being utilized. The statistics provided also gave those participating a better understanding of what disparities are within VMRC. VMRC staff were asked to share experiences or concerns as information was presented. We discussed the DDS Equity Initiative and explained how the money flows to VMRC, along with the POS data, indicating the authorizations and expenditures based on use and broken down by age, race, language, diagnosis, and resident type. We also reviewed outcomes from last year's meeting and initiatives taken due to the feedback.

Those implemented and reviewed during the meeting included:

- Ongoing Service Coordinator education identified as needs arise, but overall targeted training of services offered.
- The Diversity Equity and Inclusion Manager training will promote a healthy, supportive, inclusive, and diverse internal philosophy where employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to support consumers/families.

- Person-Centered Planning—VMRC continues to invest in developing management staff certified to provide training for VMRC staff, vendors, and families.
- Community Training—provided sessions of interest and time as to what is occurring, i.e., Self-Determination, Participant-Directed services, IHSS, Vamos a Platucar, La Familia, and Comunidad Latina.
- Better use of translators, interpreters, and equipment—will create a program to train our interpreters in VMRC processes, to reduce barriers. We have created a Multicultural Access Specialist Position (English and Spanish) that will allow in-house access to an interpreter when needed. Bi-lingual stipends continue to be in place for VMRC Service Coordinators. Continuously developing content for our lobby public service announcements to be programmed in several languages that will be available upon public access to our buildings. Updated the VMRC website, allowing viewers to translate contact to their preferred language.
- VMRC staff continues to have regular meetings with community support groups. VMRC continues to meet with the Office of Clients Rights Advocacy/ Disability Rights of California and Friends of Children with Special Needs to plan outreaches to target demographics— Asian, Indian, and Latino communities for the upcoming year. Several Zoom trainings have occurred this year, and group collaboration continues.
- Focus Groups- With the DEI Manager's support, we have conducted focus groups in the community targeting the following languages: Spanish, Cambodian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.
- Community Outreach—Ongoing immigration services/consultation is available to those in need. Continue attending Community events in our five attachment areas and creating community partnerships. Continue to work closely in supporting Community Base Organizations with their SAE Grants, such as Hear My Voice, Integrated Community Collaborative, Voice United, and Hlub Hmong Center.

Families Voice Challenges:

Some of the challenges that families voiced continue to be focused on needing to know or understand how services work and what services are available. Gaining access to services continues to be the biggest concern families expressed during the meeting. Based on the information obtained during the public meeting, trust between the regional center and the families continues to be an obstacle. The DEI Committee (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee) will continue creating an improving climate, as will the VMRC Strategic Plan strategies related to this subject.

Our Data Shows...

The VMRC data continues to indicate that one of the major disparities we have at VMRC is with adult services such as day programs, care homes, transportation, etc. We continue to hear that it is very difficult for our Hispanic families to trust their children to other people or agencies. Families continue to fear not knowing how they will be treated or if their children can communicate with their families if they are being mistreated. Statistically, post-education adult services continue to be utilized more by the White population than the Hispanic population. Still, this utilization has no disparities because the expenditures are equal to the population proportion for each ethnicity. However, we continue to see that as our population grows, Hispanics are proving to be the youngest and most populous in our regional center. Our data also indicate that our Hispanic families access services more if provided at home. Case in point, Hispanics have a

higher percentage of respite and personal assistance utilization versus white families. It is also important to understand that the largest population in the regional center is Hispanic between the ages of 3 and 14. When looking at the data and purchases from our FY 2021, the % of Hispanics with a purchase authorization is 66.7% compared to the white population is 70.5%. It is important to state that most purchases for the Hispanic group were made up of respite services and personal assistance services provided at home and services done by a family member or someone they trust, compared to Whites utilizing services provided outside of the home or such as utilizing care homes which at have a higher cost. We continue to focus closely on smaller bands of age groups to assess the extent age correlates to our expenditure finds. We see a large disparity of POS expenditures beginning at ages 8-9 years old (14% less proportionately than Asians and Whites) and most significantly in the 10–12-year-old age band (38% less proportionately than Whites). In the children's age group, White consumers represent 26% of our population, and almost half of our children are Hispanic.

Continues Challenges

One of the challenges we continue to face through the pass years has been regional center trying to communicate with families about the need at home for adult consumers. We need to figure out what type of services they would want to see available for their adult children since, in a few years, the children in our regional center will be adults. Suppose consumers continue to live with their families and are encouraged by family inclination but are uncomfortable accessing current adult services. In that case, the disparity will continue increasing in this area. To address this issue, we continue working with our local parent groups to get data and feedback from families on what services they would like to see for their adult children. Working with focus parent groups that will also target certain age groups where we see the biggest disparity and, with their help, try to find out why they might not be accessing services. One of the families' biggest concerns is that they need to understand how adult programs work and sometimes do not agree with the individual's philosophy of independence and autonomy over the group or family unit. We have obtained information from focus groups and parent groups: some parents need to be more informed and would like to see more information, especially in their language. The POS public meeting is always helpful when understanding families and their needs. It also helps VMRC understand the disparities, especially in breaking down the data to understand the area of need for families. The meetings emphasized that more education and practical knowledge are necessary for all to understand better the services currently offered, tweaks that may be needed, or services re-imagined, all with the cultural aspect included in the development.

Future Needs:

In addition to the meetings with parent groups, VMRC is determined to learn more from adult consumers. We received much feedback from the meeting with adult self-advocates during the Zoom chat session they continue to have. COVID-19 continues to be a barrier since returning to programs and regular activities has needed to be faster. It is noted that those concerns are driven by not only current but future needs as the world changes and as we become even more aware of their needs to experience a full and well-rounded life. Items mentioned include access to technology and training, connection issues, access to plain language information, care home utilization of technology, multicultural self-advocate groups, person-centered planning and follow through, regular news from the regional center, and mental health tips are positive, as well as interest in being involved in new Service Coordinator training.

Other significant concerns noted by stakeholders target the need for more individualization and privacy in care homes and ILS programs for transition-aged youth to enhance other skills learned in schools. More wrap-around services are the most desired by caregivers as the need for personal assistance is expressed. The influx of families moving to our foothill counties will require more resources than the more populous counties. And as more behaviorally challenged cases at younger ages occur, the need for crisis-level services and more intensive level of school placements seems to be a top priority for families. The number of autism cases also continues to grow, resulting in differing expectations of services, the need for more Service Coordinators, and a reduction of caseloads.

Elements discussed.

All the community, family, and consumer input continue to be valuable for better understanding the concerns and focus of our work. Based on our data generated for the public meetings and feedback received, VMRC has learned that we must be conscious of the variables involved to begin planning for future needs and preferences. Elements discussed that we would need to consider while seeking cultural competence and thereby reducing disparities include:

- Younger Hispanic Population Growth
- Dramatic Rise in Autism Continues
- Seeking Services to Match Cultural Values
- Aging of Consumers and Caregivers
- Lack of Direct Service Staff
- Migration to the Area Due to Services and Cost of Living
- High Cost of Housing and Labor Costs
- Rates/Salaries not Competitive
- Access to Health Care is Lacking
- Expectations and Need for Different Types of Services
- Crisis Level Services on the Increase for Younger Consumers
- Intensive Level of School Placements
- World events that might affect our current living
- Increased Need for Mental Health Services

Some Priorities Communicated

In response to the barriers noted, while keeping in mind the trends we are witnessing, VMRC will develop a plan to address the priority needs brought forth during the Disparity and Equity meetings. We continue to work with care homes, which have been identified as a need.

Overall, the priorities conveyed to VMRC were:

- Provide Needed Services
- Ensure Consumer Choice
- Increase Trust in our System
- Become More Culturally Aware
- Ensure Equity
- Streamline Processes
- Train Staff Well and Maintain Plans to Address these Items

Initial plans to address these items include:

- 1) parent and consumer participation in training as applicable.
- 2) parent training on navigating the regional center system.

- 3) training for Service Coordinators so they have the knowledge needed to provide good information to consumers.
- 4) training for providers to ensure quality services; orientations for new consumers made eligible to discuss services and expectations of VMRC and the System.
- 5) continue identifying resources needed and working together with Community Services to develop those services.
- 6) Person-Centered Plans for all individuals. After this process, we hope to break down the statistical information into a more understandable and meaningful format.