

# The Prevention Hub of Marin County

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The subject of this case study is Marin County's Prevention Hub. Marin County is preparing for the 2014 Affordable Care Act and the prevention initiatives that will accompany it. Associated with the new healthcare legislation is a national movement towards preventive strategies. For its part, Marin County has created an office to coordinate all of its prevention programs. That office, and the thinking behind it, is the "**Prevention Hub.**"

In San Mateo County, the social services agency does not currently focus on prevention perhaps as much as it should. San Mateo County's Human Services Agency works with people when they need direct client services to fix whatever is broken and tries to help them get back on their feet. While the agency is very good at what it does, it believes

that it could better serve the county if it were able to help communities in a way that would reduce and prevent the need for the current model of social service delivery. With that prevention model in mind, I was asked to look into the work that Marin County is doing. Marin County has its prevention groove on.

Unlike San Mateo County, Marin County has a combined Health and Human Services Agency known as HHS. Because the Marin HHS has the responsibility to provide both community health and social services, it has a very large portfolio of responsibilities within Marin County's government structure. Marin HHS's duty is to promote and protect the health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all people in Marin County.

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## **“Up-stream” prevention vs. “Down-stream” safety net services**

With such a big responsibility came the opportunity and indeed the need to be proactive and innovative. To that end, Marin County has created an integrated prevention model to provide the support their community needs “up-stream” in order to prevent residents from getting caught up in the current and swept “down-stream” towards the safety nets of traditional health and human services.<sup>1</sup> While the nets are large and staff vigilant, the County prefers that folks do not fall into the river in the first place.

Marin County Health and Human Services (HHS) is coordinating its up stream prevention services and opportunities across all of its divisions and programs through the “Prevention Hub” which is assisting communities and organizations to take action on health issues that can lead to social services problems. The Hub began its work a little over a year ago, so while it is still a work in progress as it creates itself, we can already learn from it.

## **So what is the Prevention Hub?**

The Hub is a cross-divisional effort within the county to improve partnerships with schools, communities and organizations, to work smarter with existing resources and to change the “well-being” landscapes where communities live, work, learn and play. The mission of the Hub is to advance effective prevention practices to improve the health of all people within all of the communities in Marin County.<sup>2</sup>

The Hub’s approach is to use community needs to drive change by forming partnerships to leverage community resources towards a common goal. An example of this is the Hub’s partnerships with cities in Marin to address issues of teenage drinking and

teen pregnancy. The Hub provides grant and contract funding that focuses on prevention strategies and on understanding prevention programs, and not on providing direct client services.

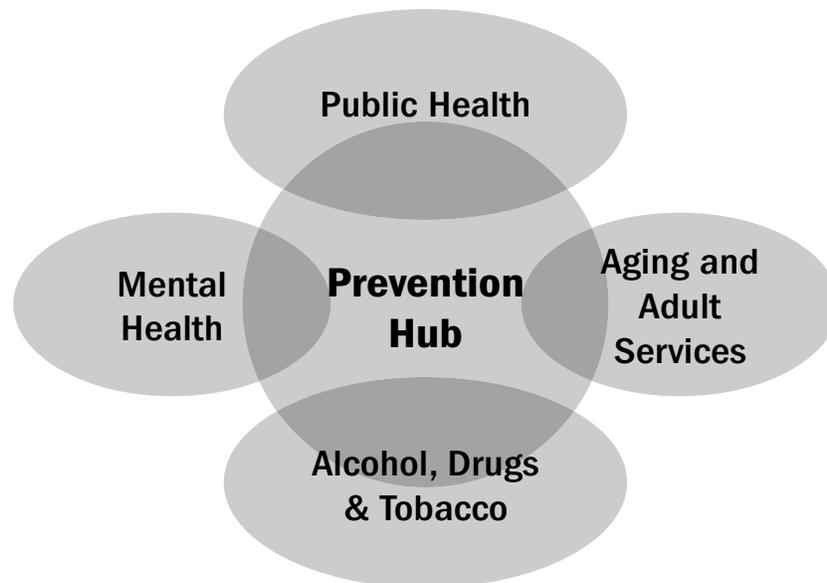
Ramping up for the 2014 Affordable Care Act and the prevention initiatives that will accompany it, Marin is taking a proactive approach. One of the goals of the Hub is to learn how to provide effective prevention services throughout the county. The Hub is part of a national movement to shift the focus upstream to prevention programs. Marin has taken advantage of the larger federal initiative to foster local prevention programs to take root through community partnering.

## **National Prevention Strategy— Coalition Models of Delivery**

The National Prevention Strategy is designed to move us from a system of sick care to one based on wellness and prevention. It builds upon the state-of-the-art clinical services in this country and an understanding of how to improve the health of individuals, families, and communities through prevention. One element of the national strategy is to engage and empower people and communities to plan and implement prevention policies and programs, believing that community coalitions can be effective in raising awareness and attention to a broad range of issues (e.g., alcohol and other substance abuse, teen pregnancy, cancer prevention and control) and implementing effective policies and programs.<sup>3</sup> The Hub is tasked with coordinating coalition plans within the county’s Strategic Plan.

The Hub’s role within HHS is to coordinate ongoing prevention work within the agency’s divisions by creating inter-divisional projects that require at least

**FIGURE 1**  
**Coordinating Function of the Hub within HHS**



two HHS divisions to be involved on any given project. To this end, the Hub is the coordinating office within HHS that leverages the strengths of the Divisions of Public Health, Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco with Aging and Adult Services and Mental Health to work towards the common goals of healthy and safe communities. To do this, each division within HHS has one or two staff assigned to perform Hub prevention work. The assigned staff does their primary work within their own divisions while making sure that the divisional prevention programs are coordinated with and through the Hub. The Hub has a handful of core staff who coordinate the divisional work on behalf of the agency's larger goals.

### **Live and Learn**

To accomplish its goals, the Hub had to learn a few things as it developed over the last year.

### **A To-Do list**

The first step is to make a list of potential prevention projects. Each project must provide a return on investment to the divisions involved and each

division must benefit from participating in the project. Pre-identified projects and opportunities must have as a goal that they provide "value added" to the HHS prevention programs and that they make a difference to the programs involved.

### **Thinking Ahead**

While it is tempting to start prevention work before getting buy-in from stakeholders, it is not wise. The Hub has learned to take the time to get the leadership and stakeholders on board through project ownership and advocacy of the prevention concepts and the work. The Hub has learned to build the political collaboration necessary to support the prevention projects and actively engage with its collaborating partners.

### **Funding**

The Hub did not and does not want a single source of funding that could be cut during the budget process. The Hub's funding strategy is to avoid the competition for non-mandated funding by getting part-time, in-kind, labor resources from each of the

collaborating divisions. By using existing resources tied to divisional budgets, the Prevention Hub operates within existing funding streams.

The Hub, in essence, is the office of coordination sitting inside the Division of Public Health. One of its main functions within HHS is to take smaller divisional initiatives of limited scope and join them together with similar programs in their sister divisions to focus the agency on the larger issue. The Hub is focusing on primary prevention issues concerning preventable mental health issues, reducing risk factors, and promoting protective factors. One of the tools that they are using is the **California Healthy Kids Survey**.<sup>4</sup>

The **California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)** is, according to its website, the most comprehensive survey of its kind in the nation. The survey addresses:

- alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use
- school safety, harassment, and violence
- nutrition and physical health
- sexual behavior and attitudes (secondary school only)
- suicide and gang involvement (secondary school only)
- youth resilience and developmental supports
- school-connectedness, truancy, and self-reported grades

The Hub uses the survey information to understand what Marin's communities need, want and are working on, and then to figure out how to leverage what they are doing individually to collectively reach towards the county goals.

One of the prevention initiatives that the Hub is at the center of is Marin's HEAL program. HEAL stands for **Healthy Eating, Active Living**.<sup>5</sup> The Hub aims to create Marin's first coordinated, county-wide strategic plan which promotes healthy eating and active living in the places where the communities live, *work, learn, and play*.

One of the tools that the Hub is using to help guide itself through the process is the CDC's **Healthy Community Action Guide (HCAG)** for working groups.<sup>6,7</sup> The guide contains the collective wisdom

and best practices information that communities need to move forward with local initiatives without having to "go it alone" or "re-invent the wheel."

## Equity and Social Justice

Another area that the Hub is in the middle of is the ongoing problem of inequity that troubles our communities. To address this issue, the Hub has created an **Equity Impact** working group that includes members of the Board of Supervisors, Steve Kinsey and Judy Arnold, and the Director of HHS, Larry Meredith. As a blueprint for how to succeed, Marin is learning from Seattle's "King County Model" on **equity and social justice** to provide everyone in the county with equal access to opportunities for living well within their communities.<sup>8</sup>

## Just the tip of the Hub

The scope of this report doesn't call for a complete listing all of the various programs, projects and initiatives that the Hub is involved in. They are diverse and surprisingly numerous for the limited number of staff involved. Anyone who is interested in prevention strategies should check out the Hub. Getting a chance to learn about it was a great experience.

## Conclusions

Between health prevention programs involving community coalition partners and community equity issues, the Hub has its hands full. Its core staff is responsible for coordinating inter-divisional work while at the same time taking the leadership role in working with diverse and dynamic community coalitions to address everything from teen alcohol use and pregnancy prevention to social equity issues. Many of these programs are high-profile and are politically sensitive, requiring the core Hub staff to be both good hands-on, operational managers, and politically astute agency operatives. This combination of requirements from a very small staff means that the people who work in the Hub need to be well-chosen for the task. To Marin's credit, they have chosen their staff well and the Hub is thriving.

The cost of running a Hub, even from within divisional budgets, needs to be considered. With a couple of full-time staff and a couple of part-time staff at the Hub office, and the leveraging of additional divisional staff efforts, the cost of running the Hub is several hundred thousand dollars per year. To do this requires belief on the part of HHS and the county that the expense of running the Hub is more than offset by the good it is doing in the community and by the savings in “down-stream” health services costs that are being realized through the efforts in “up-stream” prevention.

The Prevention Hub model works in Marin County because the Health and Human Services Agency has the responsibility for both. Since the primary focus of the Hub is on community health issues, the large umbrella of HHS is well-suited to support the model. In counties where health services and social services are managed by separate agencies, the health prevention model is only viable inside of the health services agency.

For San Mateo County, where agencies are currently separated, Marin’s focus on health prevention programs would not be as good a fit inside the department. However, the Hub model for coordinating divisional program initiatives could be modified to fit into a large social services agency, such as in San Mateo, where strong internal and external coordination can help focus the agency’s energies to meet core agency and community goals.

## Recommendations

It is not recommended that San Mateo County HAS social services agency take action at this time towards implementing a health prevention program within the agency. However, it would greatly benefit San Mateo County’s Health care system take a close look at Marin County’s Prevention Hub to determine if the Hub model could and should be implemented within San Mateo County to address its own health prevention needs.

## Acknowledgements

My BASSC research on Marin’s Prevention Hub would not have been possible without the kind support of Marin’s HHS director, Larry Meredith, the sponsorship of Heather Ravani, Social Services director, and my host, Gary Najarian, Prevention Hub coordinator. Gary and his team made me welcome and enabled my research.

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None of this would have been possible without the daily support of Jonathan Gill and Andrea Dubrow, our BASSC program administrators, who worked tirelessly to carry the program forward. It was their cheerful and professional support that made this year’s BASSC program such a wonderful success.

## References

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