

May 2016

Honorable Members of the Little Hoover Commission:

Although the majority of Californians who are experiencing psychological distress regardless of race-ethnicity feel it is possible to recover from mental health challenges, mental health disparities still remain. Many cultural groups and ethnic communities are less likely to seek services for help with a mental health concern due to negative attitudes and beliefs regarding mental illness. They are more likely than mainstream white counterparts to feel inferior to those who have not had a mental health problem.

After a decade of the MHSA's vision, much more work needs to be done to address ongoing stigma in the ethnic communities of California's populations, especially among underserved groups within the broad racial categories of White (e.g., Middle Eastern Arab, Iranian, Armenian, etc.) and API (such as Southwest Asian communities of Afghani's, etc.). We know that people with mental health challenges who feel accepted rather than isolated can reduce the toll untreated mental health challenges have on our communities. Not enough has been done to learn about the histories, cultural values and traditions of our underserved communities which have experienced extreme violence, war, displacement and major loss that, when unacknowledged through compassion and genuine understanding, fester into complex traumas that torment the spirit and diminish human resilience. Counties and providers across the state must meet these urgent challenges to know their constituents better using local community resources available to them, and to engage in ongoing training, crafting culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach strategies and services.

Sincerely,

Raja Mitry