
CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

House Bill 59 from 2002, although far-reaching and well-funded, presented a perplexing challenge to the Department of Health. The Department assigned its duties to the fledgling Substance Abuse Division, whose small staff was unprepared to direct a \$25 million appropriation and the hiring and management of many new positions. A multi-layered legislative mandate and plenty of funding for research studies proved to be not enough to build the groundwork for an integrated system of care; several crucial elements were missing and have remained elusive.

Despite the Blueprint and HB 59, the state still lacks a planned and coordinated approach.

HB 59 called for a planned, coordinated approach for tackling substance abuse, but it did not make clear whether the *Blueprint* was to be the state's comprehensive plan or whether the Division was to develop a new alternative. The bill required almost immediate reporting of results to the Legislature, and thus gave the Division virtually no time to plan how to achieve its goals. In our view, Division staff have struggled ever since to do the right thing without assurance that they are on the correct path.

The new resources were meant to boost the capability of state administration, increase the types and quantities of services offered, and expand the provider network. However, the Division directed the funds to a provider system dominated by existing providers, most of them mental health centers or their subsidiary operations. Despite the law's mandate, the provider network remains largely the same in 2006 as it was in 2002, compartmentalization of state agency budgets, personnel and tasks continues, and little inter-agency sharing of data occurs.

The Division's status is not equivalent to other Departments whose collaboration is needed.

HB 59 was unclear as to the governance structure that would manage the new resources and control their allocation. Given its charge to act "in consultation with" four other agencies, WDH has taken on a nominal leadership role. The Division's status is not on a par with the department heads who serve on the Governor's Board, and there is some overlap of assignments between these entities. Effective inter-agency collaboration has not developed, nor has a regional continuum of care.

In the nearly four years since HB 59 was enacted, the Division has not established a performance-based contracting system. Several stakeholders shared the perception that the Division serves largely as a pass-through entity for state funding, and that there is an entitlement mentality to the funding process. Little is known at the state level about client outcomes, and the system remains as it has long been: focused on providing a quantity of services, and not on the effectiveness of those services.

Basic information is still unavailable to help answer policy-makers' questions.

From the start, the Substance Abuse Division was hampered by needing to share a database with the Mental Health Division, whose system does not generally produce useful data. Because the database generates duplicated client counts, policymakers and program managers still do not have the most basic information about state-funded substance abuse services: What are the statewide needs for services, what is the state's capacity to meet those needs, and what types of services are being provided to which groups of people? Without that information, higher-level concerns cannot be addressed: Which programs are working and which are not? Are state funding efforts making a difference?

Providing client-based information can help guide resource decisions in line with HB 59 objectives.

Just as the causes of this dysfunction are longstanding, multiple, and overlapping, so the remedy may not be simple or immediate. The Legislature and Governor can begin by clearly designating a single agency, board, group or individual to lead and coordinate state efforts. The lead entity and HB 59 collaborating partners need to formally adopt one comprehensive plan that establishes measurable goals and outcomes; it will also help if they and the Legislature apply the terms "plan," "study," and "planning study" more discriminately. Future efforts under a plan should be carefully monitored and analyzed to ensure decision makers have the information they need to approve funding and policies that accomplish HB 59 objectives.

HB 59 was a fast, good start, but attaining its goals will require effective leadership, strong articulation of state goals, contracting techniques that are above reproach, and improved data gathering and analysis. Attaining these goals also depends on there being a unity of purpose and activities among stake-holders that has yet to be demonstrated.