



The Center for Behavioral Health & Wellness

Transforming behavioral health and wellness across Boston is achievable. The Center for Behavioral Health & Wellness “The Center,” established in 2022 at the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), was created in response to the growing need for evidence-based, effective, and meaningful behavioral health resources. The Center aims to promote and coordinate behavioral health and wellness programming across Boston. Envisioning a community where all can achieve their ideal behavioral health and wellness, through just, trauma-informed, and intersectional approaches. The Center focuses on reducing behavioral health inequities by addressing barriers that impede the vision.

The Center has engaged, listened to, and been informed by internal BPHC groups, civic leaders, community members, youth, behavioral health agencies, healthcare organizations, academic institutions, state officials, philanthropic groups, and the Boston Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plans.

Objectives:

- Address Boston residents' longstanding and emergent behavioral health needs through a comprehensive public health approach to behavioral health
- Develop innovative, evidence-based, and sustainable prevention and response models for behavioral health and wellness that addresses systemic inequities through a thorough and coordinated citywide response
- Align, coordinate, and support existing behavioral health and wellness programming within BPHC bureaus and City departments.
- Enhance community efforts to build resilience and improve behavioral health in everyday settings such as schools, workplaces, and faith-based organizations
- Advocate for changes in the community and institutional infrastructure that mitigate risk factors that negatively affect behavioral health, especially in historically underserved populations.

Key Activities:

- Provide immediate and long-term strategies that support behavioral health and wellness across the lifespan
- Engage in citywide communication strategies to reduce stigma related to behavioral health and increase awareness, education, and comfort in talking about behavioral health and wellness
- Coordinate behavioral health and wellness programming offered by the City of Boston
- Promote culturally competent, innovative, and evidence-based behavioral health and wellness prevention practices
- Address identified training needs in behavioral health, including cultural competency and trauma-responsive care
- Build professional development and career pathways in behavioral health and wellness, with a focus on increasing workforce diversity.

The mission of the BPHC is to work in partnership with communities to protect and promote the health and well-being of all Boston residents, especially those impacted by racism and systemic inequities.



Primary Outcomes of Interest:

Behavioral health and wellness initiatives, in coordination with other BPHC and City of Boston departments and programs, will focus on three initial priorities:

(1) Workforce

Strategies to recruit, expand, and train a more diverse, culturally competent, trauma-informed behavioral health workforce that fully represents and reflects the diversity of Boston communities.

(2) Communication

Public communications about wellness, behavioral health, and substance use that addresses stigma, offers skills in addressing behavioral health issues, and acknowledges historic and ongoing barriers to care, with an initial focus on youth behavioral health.

(3) Capacity

Capacity building and training programs in behavioral health across Boston in collaboration with community partners.

Team:



Kevin M. Simon, MD, Chief Behavioral Health Officer

Kevin M. Simon, MD, MPH, is Boston’s inaugural Chief Behavioral Health Officer, appointed by Mayor Michelle Wu. He is a physician-scientist, health policy expert, inspirational teacher, and a gifted writer. Dr. Simon is a pediatric addiction medicine psychiatrist at Boston Children’s Hospital; an instructor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School; a recent Commonwealth Fund fellow in health policy at Harvard University; and the medical director of Wayside Youth & Family Support Network. Clinically, he cares for youth and families through the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences and the new Division of Addiction Medicine at Boston Children’s Hospital. Academically, he has won multiple awards for research on structural violence, health equity, and mental health. Additionally, he consults to federal agencies on mental health system design and practices. Dr. Simon’s writings on health equity are in notable journals like the American Journal of Public Health and the New England Journal of Medicine. National audiences regularly seek his perspectives on mental health through trusted outlets.



Samara Grossman, LICSW, Center Director

Samara Grossman, MSW, LICSW is the Director of the Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness at the Boston Public Health Commission. Prior to this position she was a Clinical Social Worker with Brigham Psychiatric Services at Brigham and Women's Hospital. She is a Health Equity Scholar of the Center for Health Equity Education & Advocacy of Cambridge Health Alliance (2021-2022), and a Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar (2018-2021). She was a member of the Mass General Brigham Trauma-informed Care Initiative, co-chairing the Education and Training Committee of that Initiative; as well as co-chair of the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Department of Psychiatry at Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Brigham and Women's Hospital Social Work Racial Justice Committee. Her interests lie at the intersection of trauma-informed care, racial and social justice.



Morgan Chen, MPH, Policy & Strategy Specialist

Morgan Chen, MPH, received her B.S. in Movement Science in the School of Kinesiology at the University of Michigan. She completed her Masters in Public Health at Boston University in 2022 with certificates in Health Policy & Law and Mental Health & Substance Use. She previously directed an advocacy campaign with Harvard Medical School professor Dr. Victor Gurewich to promote a more equitable and accessible treatment for heart attack and stroke. Morgan wants to continue to advocate and address systemic inequities through policy change -- with a focus on mental health and individuals who are involved with the current criminal legal system. At the Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness, she now supports on supporting and uplifting programs in the City to help provide resources to improve mental health to everyone in Boston.



Stephanie Santizo, Project Assistant

Stephanie Santizo received her B.A in Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She has garnered experience in early childcare and case management. Stephanie has always been passionate about helping others and has maintained a strong interest in mental health. She aims to utilize her design skills to create informative mental health content for the public. Stephanie serves as a project assistant at the Center for Behavioral Health & Wellness, where she helps support programs and initiatives that aim to enhance access to mental health resources for all residents of Boston.

**The Center does not provide direct clinical or wellness services.*