



North Sound Behavioral Health Organization, LLC

301 Valley Mall Way, Suite 110, Mount Vernon, WA 98273
<http://northsoundbho.org> • 360.416.7013 • 800.684.3555 • F 360.416.7017

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Contact: Joe Valentine, Executive Director, 360-416-7013

Medicaid-funded mental health, substance abuse programs brought under one umbrella serving five Northwest counties

MOUNT VERNON - Mental health and substance abuse programs serving nearly 34,000 Medicaid enrollees in five northwest Washington counties will be overseen under the umbrella of the newly named North Sound Behavioral Health Organization (North Sound BHO) effective April 1, 2016.

For clients receiving or desiring services, benefits and service options will not change. For many, having all of the programs under one administration and one point of contact for clients will streamline care and improve access, according to Joe Valentine, Executive Director of the North Sound Behavioral Health Organization, formerly the North Sound Mental Health Administration.

“Many people we serve have both mental health and substance use addiction issues, which makes bringing both under one umbrella a great way to improve care coordination,” Valentine said. “We will continue to work closely with the counties and a network of local community mental health and substance use treatment agencies to provide a full range of services offered by the Medicaid plan.”

Legislation passed in 2014 created Behavioral Health Organizations as the model for purchasing and administering public mental health and substance use disorder services in managed care.

Mental health services in Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties have been overseen by the North Sound Mental Health Administration, now known as North Sound BHO, while individual counties have directed substance use disorder treatment.

A comprehensive plan for the region was developed over the past two years in concert with county officials and regional behavioral health providers to ensure a seamless transition, Valentine said. The team also worked closely with a team of consultants to develop a more integrated approach to detox and other treatment interventions.

“Ultimately, our goal is to make a difference in the lives of people we serve in getting the help they need, in managing their illness and moving forward with their recovery,” Valentine said.

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