VALLEY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL CENTER
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

RESOURCE CONSULTANT REPORT
December 7, 2022

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>

Concerns regarding transportation services within the Valley Mountain Regional Center (VMRC) catchment area have come to the forefront as the service delivery system is emerging from the 2020 pandemic era. As a result of their collective concerns regarding transportation services, the Coalition of Local Area Service Providers (CLASP) submitted a letter dated August 30, 2022, to the VMRC Consumer Services Committee expressing their concerns about the lack of transportation services and its impact on participants. The letter also states that the current inefficient coordination and gaps in transportation services may affect the future viability and sustainability of day programs and residential programs. In response to CLASP's letter, VMRC leadership initiated an inquiry to identify barriers and ways all partners can work together to improve communication and close transportation gaps. The CLASP concerns are categorized under six (6) main areas: Communication, Processes, Priorities, Vendorization, Training, and Accountability.

VMRC established a service agreement with a transportation broker to coordinate and develop transportation services. R&D Transportation Brokers (R&D) was awarded the contract that began July 2021. Since then, R&D has been providing services within the VMRC catchment area. R&D contracts with five other regional centers and has a positive reputation with each of them. The concept of a transportation broker is new to VMRC's service delivery system including day programs, residential programs, commercial transportation providers, service coordinators and their managers. With R&D now being an integral part of the transportation system and the central point of communication, the lines of communication and expectations have changed for all the partners involved. Fortunately, there is mutual interest between all partners to ensure participants have access to safe and efficient transportation services to access their community and day programs.

Although VMRC, R&D, and CLASP have collaborated to develop their partnerships and communication systems, at the time of this inquiry, the communication between all the partners is fragmented, disjointed, and unresponsive to the participants' needs for transportation. Each of the partners has a responsibility to ensure transportation services are provided and occurs timely, and efficiently.

As a result of the inquiry into transportation services, following are the recommendations that should be considered for implementation by the specified partners and following the recommendations is the detailed background that resulted in their development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **COMMUNICATION**

   A. **Develop Communication Systems** -- It is recommended that R&D collaborate with day programs, residential programs, service coordinators and their managers and families to develop and operationalize clear procedures and mutual expectations for a communication system that is responsive to receipt of information, notifications, questions, issues, and concerns that need to be resolved by R&D and the vendored transportation providers. The procedures need to include but not be limited to the following:
   - What needs to be included in the information that needs to be communicated?
   - How should the information be communicated, i.e., email, voicemail, text etc.? (emergent vs. long term systemic)
   - When does the Information need to be communicated? (requires immediate attention and resolution vs. can wait for resolution)
   - Who does the information need to be communicated to?
   - What are the timelines for the recipient to respond back to the originator of the communication?

   Target date for completion: January 30, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will distribute a draft of communication procedures to VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting on February 10, 2023, for approval. Upon approval, a schedule will be developed to distribute to all partners.

   B. **Opportunities to Communicate Transportation Information** -- It is recommended that R&D continue to share information regarding the status of transportation services at the meetings as follows; Monthly CLASP meeting, Monthly Transportation Forum, and the Monthly VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting. In addition, it's recommended that R&D collaborate with the commercial and other vendored transportation providers to develop a report and communication system that ensures the receipt and transfer of information regarding the transportation service needs for VMRC participants.

   Target date for completion: January 30, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will submit a schedule of meetings that R&D has with commercial and other vendored transportation providers to the Monthly VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting. Thereafter, updates will be provided on the transportation vendor community response to unmet needs or other transportation issues or concerns.

2. *PROCESSES*

   A. **Data Collection**-- It is recommended that VMRC and R&D clearly define data categories that need to be collected. Categories need to be defined and

displayed on the documents where the data is viewed or shared with partners. The categories need to include the following:

- **TSR's in R&D's Database** (reflects completed TSR and submitted by Service Coordinator and is now in R&D's database.)
- **TSR's Missing from R&D's Database** (R&D notified by one of the partners there is a request to modify the TSR or the VMRC service coordinator needs to originate a TSR)
- **Fully Met Transportation Needs** (Participant has transportation scheduled per TSR)
- **Unmet Transportation Needs** (Participant has no transportation assignment due to a lack of resources from vendored transportation companies)
- **Partially Met Transportation Needs** (Participant has transportation for specific days but wants to increase days but there is no transportation available)
- **Temporary Transportation Provided Pending Commercial Transportation** (Participants family or residential program is providing temporary transportation pending the availability of commercial transportation assignment.
- **Transportation Vendors** -- (Number of vendors providing transportation and the number of participants being served)
- **Pending Vendorization** -- (Number of day programs, residential programs and commercial providers that have applied to provide transportation services should also include a target date for vendorization)

Target date for completion: By December 15, 2022, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will ensure the data points described above are incorporated in R&D's data collection system and presented at meetings with partners.

B. **Data Sharing** --It is recommended that R&D share data collected with partners, including CLASP, Day Program Providers, Residential Providers, the Monthly Transportation Forum, and the Monthly VMRC/R&D Partnership meetings. In addition, the information regarding unmet needs should be shared with transportation vendors to provide them with the opportunity to provide services.

Target date for completion: By January 12, 2023, 2023, Leticia Leon will share data with partners and transportation vendors.

C. **Survey Data --** R&D conducted a survey of day program providers, participants, and families that began at the end of October 2022. It is recommended that R&D share the survey data, outcomes and action plan to resolve issues, with CLASP, the VMRC/R&D Partnership Meetings, and the Transportation Forum.

Target date for completion: By December 15, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will provide the survey data outcomes and an action plan to resolve issues to CLASP, the VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting and the Transportation Forum.

D. **Transportation Process Analysis--** The collection and analysis of the transportation data will identify breakdowns in the implementation of the transportation process. The identified breakdowns should be addressed via a collaborative Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process.

Target date for completion: Ongoing. Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will report CQI processes to the VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting for review, discussion, and recommendations.

3. PRIORITIES

A. **Communication with Day Program Providers and Transportation Vendors** -- It is recommended that R&D collaborate with each day program provider and transportation vendors by scheduling monthly meetings with them together to reconcile requests for participant transportation, resolve discrepancies, and discuss and seek resolution to individual participant transportation issues or situations and to review any SIR's (Special Incident Reports) for the participants that attend their day program. This will facilitate better communication and resolution of issues and provide transparency on setting priorities.

Target date for completion: By January 30, 2023, Laticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will present a schedule of meetings and attendees to the Monthly VMRC/R&D Partnership Meeting.

4. VENDORIZATION

A. **Vendorization Training** -- In order to efficiently support the development of transportation vendors it is recommended to provide comprehensive vendorization training quarterly for at least the next two years. The training attendees should include any businesses seeking vendorization as a transportation provider for VMRC participants. The training session needs to include but not be limited to the following:

- Process for and development of documents for vendorization as a provider of transportation, including a checklist of all the documents needed; definitions and translation into lay terms of language used typically for commercial transportation in the vendorization process; processes and required documentation for billing; rate setting and

timelines for invoice submission and payment by VMRC for transportation services provided.

Target date for completion: By January 30, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will begin reporting outcomes to the VMRC/R&D Partnership Monthly Meetings

5. *TRAINING*

A. **Transportation Vendor Orientation & Communication** -- It is recommended that R&D establish regularly scheduled meetings with transportation vendors and provide information to them about R&D's role and responsibility in the transportation service system. R&D may need support from VMRC Community Services, Resource Development when sharing this information. Additional information sessions that should be provided include the following:

- **Transportation Needs** -- Current unmet transportation needs and projections for future transportation needs.
- **Audit Orientation**-- an orientation to audits conducted by R&D including what vendors can expect and how they should prepare for the audit.
- **Billing Orientation--**This orientation needs to include information on the billing process and timelines. When and how to communicate billing issues or nonpayment issues to R&D and the expected timelines for R&D to respond.
- **Orientation to Quality Assurance and Special Incident Reporting --** The orientation should include what will be reviewed in the Quality Assurance process and how to prepare for the review. The SIR reporting and submission of the forms needs to be included as well.

Target date for completion: By January 30, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, will provide a schedule of training and after the training, attendance will be reported at the VMRC/R&D Monthly Transportation Partnership Meetings.

6. *ACCOUNTABILITY*

R&D VMRC Service Agreement -- It is recommended that VMRC and R&D review the Service Agreement for Transportation Brokerage Services, effective July 1, 2021-June 30, 2026. The review should ensure expectations are clearly defined.

Target date for completion: By March 1, 2023, Leticia Leon, R&D Vice President, and Brian Bennett, VMRC Director of Community Services, will review the R&D VMRC Service Agreement and amend it if needed.

INQUIRY BACKGROUND and FINDINGS of CLASP CONCERNS

VMRC identified a Resource Consultant, as a neutral fact finder to conduct the inquiry, gathering facts from a sampling of the partners including but not limited to CLASP members, R&D, VMRC staff and vendored transportation providers. Their concerns are categorized under six (6) main areas: Communication, Processes, Priorities, Vendorization, Training and Accountability.

COMMUNICATION

CLASP expressed their concern that communication with R&D is slow and untimely. Members provided multiple examples of cases when they identified issues with transportation and it was reported to R&D customer service with no response. R&D was not responding to verify receipt of issues, what they were doing on their end to problem solve or communicating back to the sender the status of their request or the situation. This has resulted in frustration on the part of CLASP members and families in working in partnership with R&D in resolving transportation issues. CLASP members also communicated that they may get a response if they included R&D upper management in the email. During the inquiry, these communication concerns were brought immediately to the attention of R&D by the Resource Consultant and R&D upper management responded by implementing a new protocol including timelines for responding to emails and customer service calls. This is a positive step in opening up communication with participants, families, service coordinators, residential and day programs; however, all of the entities referenced need to ensure they are also communicating any changes back to R&D in a timely manner so the coordination and dispatch of transportation services meets the needs of participants and is timely and efficient.

The requests for transportation, TSR's, are generated by the VMRC service coordinators. It was shared that the TSR's are not processed and approved in a timely manner or in some cases, the TSR's are not generated by the service coordinators at all. Service coordinators and their managers need to assess their process to determine where there are time delays and submission of all TSR's whether or not transportation services are immediately available. This will ensure that R&D has the data they need to develop transportation resources and schedule and coordinate transportation services. Once the TSR is received by R&D there doesn't seem to be consistent communication with the Service Coordinator or other partners to verify receipt of the TSR or to communicate plans for providing or not being able to provide transportation by R&D.

CLASP members also shared there is a lack of communication regarding scheduling participants. This includes which transportation company has been identified as the provider, the start date and the arrival and departure times from their pickup points. The lack of communication with scheduling needs to be the responsibility of all partners to communicate schedules and any changes between partners so there are not multiple buses assigned to pick up the same participant; ensure participants are ready at the designated time; delays in arrival and departure; absences and/or terminating services.

Effective, efficient and timely communication between all partners is essential to ensure the transportation system meets the needs of participants, families, day programs and residential programs and ensures participants access to their communities.

PROCESSES

CLASP expressed a concern that R&D may not have transportation data that reflects the capacity and status of transportation services prior to the pandemic. R&D has provided pre pandemic data in a PowerPoint format at the Transportation Forum meetings which are held once a month and also at CLASP meetings. Although this information is valuable from a historical perspective and can provide some information and be a point of reference, it is not reflective of the current post pandemic period. Circumstances have dramatically changed for participants, families, and residential and day programs. Some participants are reluctant to return to their day program full time or in some cases not at all. Day programs are facing staffing shortages and so therefore also cannot always accommodate increases in participant attendance, regardless of transportation availability, that want to return or would like to increase the number of days they attend. Also prior to the pandemic the transportation vendors had a more readily available qualified workforce that could be hired and trained as drivers. The current post pandemic period has left the vendored transportation industry and service providers with a scarcity of qualified applicants that can be hired, thus resulting in the lack of drivers to transport participants and for day programs to have adequate staffing levels to accommodate new, returning, or increased days for participants. The hiring process for transportation drivers has also been impacted by the timely processing of background checks and Department of Motor Vehicles and California Highway Patrol driver clearances.

CLASP conveyed that the TSR's have errors, are miss routed through the process and as a result, participants either don't show on the transportation list or the participants are listed incorrectly. In addition, it was also conveyed that TSR's have been pending for as much as 6 months or more without transportation services being provided or any follow up from any of the partners on the status, i.e., participant, family, service coordinator, R&D, day program or residential provider. Beginning at the end of October 2022, R&D initiated a survey of participants, families, day, and residential programs to verify the information on the TSR's to determine if it is accurate and reflective of the current needs and to make sure they had TSR's for everyone. The resulting data should be a more comprehensive and accurate reflection of the transportation services needed and R&D will be taking the lead in facilitating communication between all partners to ensure that transportation is provided promptly and as efficiently as possible.

CLASP also indicated that routing seems to be inefficient, i.e., buses arrive with empty seats, participants are not scheduled for transportation when the bus already stops at the home; multiple buses are going to the same care home and end up at the same day program. The R&D survey outcome should highlight these discrepancies and offer opportunities to ensure transportation is scheduled more efficiently while still meeting the individual needs of the participants.

The process for submitting and processing TSR's needs to be reviewed by R&D, VMRC service coordinators and their managers to ensure the process is working, identify where the process has broken down, adjust the process and then share the new and improved process with the responsible partners.

PRIORITIES

CLASP expressed that from their perspective, R&D appears to have total control over service decisions; they (R&D) seem to decide who gets transportation services when, whether a new

participant is provided transportation over a returning participant or a part time participant adding additional days per week. All of the partners in the process should engage in regular and effective communication working together to ensure that priorities are clear based on the availability of vendored transportation and their capacity to add participants to an existing route or create a new route.

Through dialog between partners, R&D will have a better opportunity to ensure their data is accurately reflecting the status of the participant. For example, participants that have temporary transportation services provided by a family or a caregiver and are waiting for vendored transportation should be reflected in R&D's data in a separate category so that vendored transportation services can be provided in lieu of the temporary transportation when it's available and/or as new transportation resources are developed. Additionally, the R&D data also needs to have a separate category that shows participants that are part time transportation riders that are waiting for full time transportation. These additional data categories will provide more accurate information and better decision-making information to R&D as they work with vendored transportation in the provision of services.

<u>VENDORIZATION</u>

CLASP voiced their concerns regarding R&D conducting audits of their vendored transportation services. VMRC made the decision to contract with a transportation broker rather than to fill the vacated VMRC Transportation Coordinator position. Although it was conveyed that R&D "replaced" one person, they have the capacity to expand the development and coordination of vendored transportation in the VMRC catchment area. They are an established broker that currently has contracts with six (6) other regional centers. As a part of this inquiry the regional centers provided positive feedback on their regional centers experience with R&D as their transportation broker.

The scope of R&D's contractual responsibilities is to administer VMRC's transportation service system. They are also responsible for the development of transportation services, including working with existing transportation providers, identifying new transportation resources and vendors, providing technical support to potential programs and commercial transportation companies that are seeking vendorization; executing transportation provider contracts and monitoring contract compliance; conduct quality assurance reviews of transportation services; investigating Special Incident Reports and providing training to all transportation partners. R&D is not a transportation service provider and therefore qualifies under Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 54342, (a) (83) to do so. R&D does not have the authority to establish rates for transportation services. Rates are established by the State Department of Developmental Services through legislative and regulatory processes.

CLASP members that are interested in being vendored to provide transportation find the process to be overwhelming because they were not provided clear procedures which results in a complicated and lengthy approval process. In addition, day programs that are interested in being vendored have found they are not familiar with some of the commercial transportation language and thus need more technical support from R&D to understand and complete the vendorization process so there are less "back and forth" corrections needed which would ensure the process is completed within a reasonable length of time.

CONCLUSION

Through the transportation inquiry process information was gathered from a variety of sources and the findings and recommendations highlight the need to develop stronger partnerships and processes for communicating information and resolving issues. As the transportation broker for VMRC, R&D is the designated hub of all communication between partners and therefore needs to take the lead to ensure that all partners are fully informed, listen to their input, make adjustments accordingly and establish opportunities to share system information including that related to the scheduling and quality of transportation services for individual participants. This committed effort will ensure that partnerships are restored and maintained while ensuring transportation needs are met on a day-to-day basis as well as meeting the future needs for transportation. These actions will take time to implement but will likely resolve most of the immediate issues of concern expressed by CLASP.

There are still statewide systemic issues that need to be addressed such as transportation rates and the availability of qualified drivers which are not under the control of either VMRC or R&D. In response to these statewide system issues, the Department of Developmental Services is convening a Transportation Taskforce that will address the statewide systemic transportation issues. Given the current situation statewide and the Department of Developmental Services knowledge of their existence, it's unrealistic to expect that the need for Alternative Services will end by December 31, 2022. Given the staffing shortages for both the day program and transportation services it will take significant communication and coordination as services are phased in to meet the transportation and community access needs that existed prior to the abrupt stoppage of them at the onset of the pandemic.

Report Respectfully Submitted by Melinda Gonser, Resource Consultant