

Developing a Community-Based Mental Health System: Establishing Tiered Levels of Care Through Multi-Sector Collaboration

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1 BACKGROUND & GOAL

Mental health support remains difficult to access for many community members due to stigma, limited mental health literacy and scarcity of specialized providers. Angat Kahimati is a community-based program piloted in Naga City that operationalizes the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) framework through barangay-level services and collaboration among Angat Buhay, Inc., Ateneo de Naga University, the local government unit of Naga and community partners. The program aims to embed accessible, rights-based and evidence-informed mental health support within existing community structures – particularly through Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and trained volunteers as frontline link to care. This approach aligns with Republic Act 11036 which supports community-based mental health facilities and the training of community volunteers in mental health promotion.

2 FRAMEWORK

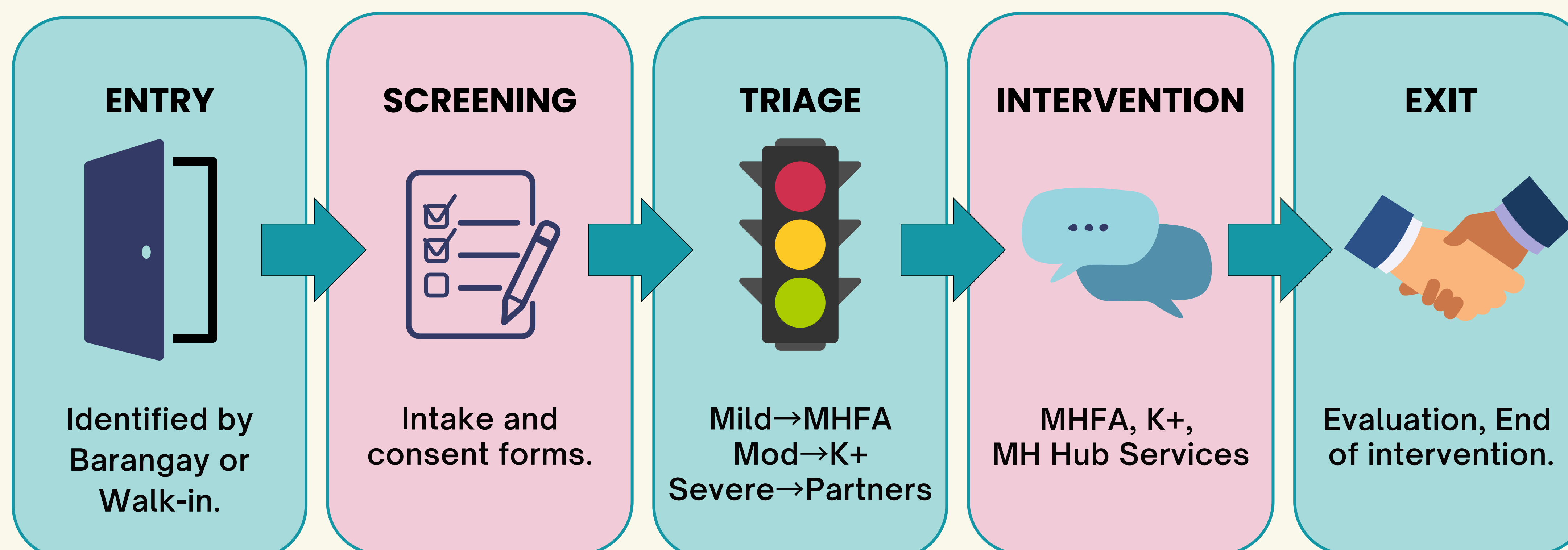


The program adopts a person-centered, recovery-oriented and rights-based approach, emphasizing community outreach, coordinated service networks and appropriate referral to professional care.

The **Mental Health Literacy (MHL)** arm is one of Kahimati's preventive foundation, which equips BHWs, volunteers and community members with practical knowledge about mental health, common signs of distress, self-care and resilience, stigma reduction, respectful communication, and safe help-seeking. Through barangay-based sessions, community fora and local responsive information materials, participants are oriented to available services and referral pathways while promoting dignity, privacy, non-discrimination and early access to support.

The **Kahimati Student Internship Program** integrates academic supervision with community volunteerism to strengthen the future mental health workforce. Student interns assist in planning MHL trainings, develop context-responsive training modules and materials, and facilitate approved sessions for BHWs, volunteers and community participants. Following training and close supervision, they also serve as Mental Health First Aid providers at the Mental Health Hub by recognizing distress, listening empathically, providing non-clinical initial support and linking individuals to appropriate services. Interns do not diagnose, provide psychotherapy or independently manage crisis cases; all urgent and complex concerns are escalated through established supervision and referral protocols.

3 COMMUNITY CARE FLOW



4 IMPLEMENTATION INSIGHTS

Early implementation indicates that clear roles among dutybearers, strong LGU anchoring, tiered capacity-building and consistent technical supervision are essential to program safety and sustainability. Academic supervision helps maintain fidelity to evidence-informed practice, while community volunteers and BHWs ensure local relevance, trust and accessibility.

5 PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Effective community mental health programs require more than awareness activities, they need a coordinated system that equips community with mental health literacy, progressive skills training, competency checks and sustained supervision. Safety and continuity of care depend on clear referral, feedback and escalation pathways linking barangays and the Mental Health Hub with specialized providers. Strong LGU partnership is likewise essential to establishing governance, risk- management, safeguarding confidentiality and emergency-response protocols. These elements are consolidated in the Angat Kahimati Handbook, which provides standardized training modules, client-flow procedures, supervision models, monitoring tools and operational guidance that may be adapted by other LGUs.

KEY MESSAGE

Angat Kahimati positions BHWs, volunteers and community institutions as the first point of connection – not the final destination – for final health care. By combining literacy, early non-clinical support, resilience-building, supervised student engagement and a reliable referral network, the program makes mental health care more accessible, coordinated, culturally responsive and sustainable.