



Southern Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration

August 11, 2025, 10:30am-12:30pm

Virtual

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees: Total 80

Host/Facilitators:

Department of Children and Families – Cristina Perez Regional Collaboration Coordinator, Lourdes Dorado-Rubio, Regional Director, Melanie Castro Regional Operations Supervisor

Presenter: LEEANNE SACINO, Executive Director Florida Coalition to End Homelessness

Full Attendee List is Provided in Appendix A

I. CALL TO ORDER

Cristina Perez called to order the Southern Region Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration at 10:32am on August 11, 2025. This meeting was held virtually.

II. WELCOME

Lourdes Dorado-Rubio, Regional Director for the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) welcomed the attendees. The following individuals provided introductions:

Melanie Castro, Department of Children and Families, SAMH, Southern Regional Operations Supervisor

Cristina Perez, Department of Children and Families, SAMH, Regional Collaboration Coordinator

Leeanne Sacino, MBA Executive Director Florida Coalition to End Homelessness

III. PRESENTATION

Leeanne Sacino, Executive Director for the Florida Coalition to End Homelessness provided a presentation on "The Homeless Response System" which included an overview of the Homeless Continuum of Care, Homeless Crisis Response Systems, and how to advocate for this population. Briefly discussed annual "Point in Time" counts which allows for a general count, not an actual census, of individuals unhoused in the county to be reportable to HUD. Homeless Continuums of Care (CoC) are local planning bodies that are required to ensure



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that resources exist and are available in their community. These CoC's include a board, lead agencies, members, and stakeholders. The presentation discussed the components of an effective homeless crisis response system and the coordinated entry system (CES). Suggestions for advocating for this population included joining the CoC Network, contributing to data sharing, assisting in the development of the CoC plan, providing feedback on the CoC, and educating peers and individuals on the CoC. Leanne then shared that the Executive Director for the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust, the lead agency in the Southern Region, is Vicky Mallet.

Links to the Annual Report on Homelessness and CoC contacts provided by Leanne Sacino at the conclusion of the presentation.

Questions and Answers:

Barbara Suarez, Alliance for Aging: The presentation was great, we will be sharing the slides with our executive director who is a very strong advocate for this population. We do see and are aware of crisis for the elderly. We do work with Mia Case for permanent and supportive housing, and we do have some relationships to try to guide them in accessing long term care services for those individuals who are housed there. So again, we are really aware and appreciate everything you do. it is a difficult cause, but its true, homelessness is growing. If there is anything that the Alliance can do in support of the cause, we are here to support.

John Newcomer, Thriving Mind South Florida: We have contractual relationships with DCF and funding that we receive at times have conditions to target high risk populations such as pregnant women. One consideration could be for contracts to be thought through at the community level. We could potentially include individuals struggling with being unhoused as a high risk population. It takes decades of research to identify a high risk population, but we could build on that

Sandra McQueen-Baker, Fresh Start of Miami-Dade: I heard Leanne mention that there are meetings that have open memberships through the homeless CoC, and I was interested in knowing when these meetings are and where are these meeting. Do you just walk in and sign up? How does that work?

Leanne Sacino, Florida Coalition to End Homelessness: The CoC's all have websites and contact information. You should reach out to the lead agency listed for your area and they will guide you on where those locations are and how to get involved. If you have any issues, or you can't get in contact with your CoC contact, please let me know. My email is there, please reach out to me. I will be glad to introduce you and make it happen. We want to make sure everyone has a seat at the table and that we are all sharing information. That is the whole point of the CoC. If everyone works together, we are in a much better place.



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John Newcomer, Thriving Mind South Florida: I just wanted to take the opportunity to say that DCF, for the group, their primary mission is not housing. The Homeless Trust primary mission is around housing, DCF mission, at least in Miami, is not. But there is a gap. We did try to propose something, and we will probably do it again this year, some pilot projects. Because clearly people are falling through the cracks, where you have someone that DCF and the Managing Entity have invested a lot of money to get this person into recovery, they are doing great, and then if they don't achieve stable housing, it could all fall apart. So we are really keen to work on something like this but we recognize that, DCF is not funded by the State to do this, we are not funded by the State to do this, but can we work together some way to identify that there is a housing gap. And if I could say to the presenter, the Homeless Trust does an amazing job but they are very rational and they try to draw down dollars from HUD. And the HUD dollars get drawn down by targeting people who meet the HUD definition of homelessness. And the HUD definition of Homelessness doesn't actually fit a lot of our population. So even though we understand their rational approach to only draw down HUD dollars, you have a lot of people who need Assisted Living Facility (ALF) placement, they don't meet the definition of chronically homeless by HUD (homeless for a year or more). For anyone on the call that doesn't understand, if someone is chronically homeless by HUDs definition, but they go into residential treatment, the clock gets reset, and they are no longer chronically homeless. I very much appreciate this presentation and meeting, I state again that maybe during the next legislative session, we try to work on some sort of pilot project to show that we get a better return of investment, from all our dollars, by doing some sort of bridge funding.

Leeanne Sacino, Florida Coalition to End Homelessness: I hear you, it's been a concern for a while, and you're right. HUDs definition of chronically homeless is that they've been homeless for a year or more, if they get housed along the way, than we must start counting all over. But there is a caveat there, and this is where CoC can set priorities right? So, Miami Dade Homeless Trust is looking at priorities for permanent and supportive housing for those chronically homeless, but the caveat is that 4 episodes of homelessness within 3 years that equal 12 months, could be utilized a lot more than it is. Its the documentation requirement that is the hiccup. I expect to see some changes with HUD, over the next few years, and those definitions might change

John Newcomer, Thriving Mind South Florida: we are tracking that, and we are working together, and I'm so happy to talk with you, because I think we are all trying to figure out this bridge because clearly people are falling through the tracks between the seriously mentally ill and the substance use population versus what HUD will pay for. We have a great partnership with the Homeless Trust, our Board chair right now works for the Homeless Trust, and Vicky Mallet the Executive Director sits on our board, but at the end of the day, for good financial



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reasons, they must work the current HUDs definition which leaves most of our population out of services.

Leeanne Sacino, Florida Coalition to End Homelessness: The Florida Supportive Housing Coalition met with a group of stakeholders across State to talk about ways to expand supportive housing. One of the big takeaways was that the Governor Ron Desantis office said was you should have a workgroup to come up with an action plan related to expanding services and how to braid those fundings together. Some of the recommendations were very much like your input, so the work has been done, its just a matter of “how do you fund it?” and “how do you make it happen?”. We know there is not enough supportive housing for all the people that need it and there isn’t enough funding for it either. There might be some funding from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Florida Finance Corporation might be able to braid some funding, but the service piece is the issue and making sure that those services are there to wrap around. It’s a work in progress.

The presentation was shared with all members on the Southern Regional Collaborative email distribution list.

IV. PROVIDER - SUCCESS STORIES

Cristina Perez, Regional Collaboration Coordinator, provided a presentation highlighting Southern Regional success stories.

Success stories included two scenarios of lives saved by the Living Room employees at New Horizons Community Mental Health Center, a network service provider contracted with the Managing Entity, Thriving Mind South Florida, opening its doors in May 2024.

V. FOCUS TOPIC AND OPEN DISCUSSION

Cristina Perez, Regional Collaboration Coordinator, presented on the focus topic for the Southern Region, “Strengthening Community Networks and Cross Agency Collaboration” as well as future collaboratives. Attendees were asked for ideas for focus areas on this topic.

Lourdes Dorado-Rubio, DCF SAMH: I think a good example of a strong collaboration that has been almost 20 years in the making is our Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Coalition in Miami-Dade County. We started having meetings with law enforcement, Habsi Kaba the CIT Coordinator, probably in the year 2000. Over the years the CIT training, and these series of meetings, grew from being quarterly to becoming more intimate and more frequent, where certain police departments who frequent certain Baker Act facilities meet



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on a monthly basis to try to work on challenges. We have really improved the relationships and have an impact on how those entities work together

Derek Moore, Thriving Mind South Florida: I am currently the Peer Services Manager and thank you for this presentation. I had never heard of B.A.C.A. and that was something I was truly blown away by, so thank you for that. As far as ideas for strengthening networks and improving interagency collaboration, and one of the things that has come out from ROSC steering committee, is resource fairs. We try to include various agencies from across the board to come together and provide the community with the resources and the services that they offer. This is a little bit easier said than done, when thinking about scheduling and logistics. The other piece of this is, how do you include Monroe County? Which often gets left out of a lot of these initiatives. We need more people involved.

Where are we seeing the strongest community collaboration right now and what made it work?

Sandra McQueen-Baker, Fresh Start of Miami-Dade: There are several subcommittees that we have, including Derek, and we break them out into different subcommittees and each of us takes a little bite out of the apple. For instance, community integration how do we get peers together? and one of the solutions was the Friendship Games. We have peers who are slipping through the cracks because they are afraid to take the tests. So we are trying to identify through a peer poll that we created, what is the problem that is keeping you from passing these test. Id also add in workforce development because the background screening waiver takes time in order for those who can pass the test, it takes time for them to get the ball moving. We have to start looking at things differently in order to support people who have background screening issues and will jobs be available for individuals who have lived experience? How can we support that workforce development piece as well? Subcommittees have been formed but we need more people involved.

Derek Moore, Thriving Mind South Florida: Cristina was asking for an example of cross agency collaboration, and the friendship games is the perfect example. We had over 500 people attend this event and not only attend but donate and volunteer their time. This is just an example of agencies and community stakeholders were able to come together to put on this incredible thing that we continue to push out every year.

Information on the Friendship Games was shared with all members on the Southern Regional Collaborative email distribution list.

Maureen Dunleavy, Guidance Care Center: As you know Monroe does have difficulty traveling to Miami events because of the travel budget, so we love any opportunity to anything virtual. We participate in all of Derek's meetings and obviously this forum has been very helpful and of course Monroe does a great job at community integration and cross agency collaboration because we all sit on the same boards. I am on the board for



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CoC in Monroe County and there are subcommittee on those boards with resources on the community, not just for homelessness, and then our peers in the upper keys and lower keys attend those meetings to make sure that they have the information to strengthen those resources across the continuum.

Lourdes Dorado-Rubio, DCF SAMH: we have been exploring how to do these meetings with Monroe, I completely agree with Derek and yourself that we tend to focus more on Miami but definitely in 2026 we will make our way down there and we will attend your monthly meetings virtually. We do want to slip on to your agenda for those meetings and provide any updates that we have.

Individuals were encouraged to approach Cristina Perez if specific feedback wanted to be shared in a smaller setting as individual, smaller, meetings can be arranged with the SAMH office.

VI. FUTURE COLLABORATIVES

Cristina Perez presented information on the future collaborative to include:

- Attendance metrics
- Survey outcomes- statewide priorities, regional priorities, need for additional resources and supports.
- Lunch and Learns – previous presenter and schedule of future meetings.
- Upcoming meeting dates with November meeting being held virtually and 2026 location to be determined.

At our Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration meeting held in February 2025, a suggestion provided by Sergeant John Blackerby, a CIT coordinator, voiced the importance of having access to information of services while responding to a 911 call in the community, after further discussion and additional support from Heather Winters with the Miami-Dade's Sherriff's Office, as well as input from other Law Enforcement, we developed an idea that Law Enforcement could use on the field. We shared the idea with Thriving Mind South Florida, who developed a QR code that law enforcement officers will be able to use when responding to 911 calls. The QR code leads to a crisis response page on the Managing Entity website that will allow families and individuals to have immediate access to services provided to Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. The release of this tool is pending approval from the Communications Department at Headquarters. We will share this tool at future meetings and get an update from law enforcement on the effectiveness of this tool.

The Statewide identified resources and supports needed, per survey results, included:



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1. Training: Cross-Agency, Topic Specific, and Simulations
 - In July of this year, FADAA released an updated Baker Act Training addressing Law Enforcement and specific Mental Health Professionals requirements that have been updated with Statute changes. The training is open to all and offers CEU's at no cost.
 - [My FL Learn | Florida DCF](#)
2. Toolkits: Resource Guides and Maps
 - 988 created Toolkits to be used for marketing the 988 Florida Lifeline. These are preapproved by DCF Communications. Link provided at the conclusion of the meeting.
 - [Resources - 988 Florida Lifeline](#)
3. Policy Clarification and Technical Assistance
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Team inboxes: SNR.SAMH.SUPPORT@MYFLFAMILIES.COM. This inbox is monitored by the SAMH regional team.
 - Baker Act Manual: public facing manual that provides further guidance on requirements and regulations. It is updated annually. A copy of the manual was digitally shared at the conclusion of the meeting.
 - [2024 Baker Act Handbook](#)
4. Small Groups: Topic Specific Discussions and Planning
 - The intent is to offer breakout groups to discuss specific regional concerns or initiatives, such as the suggestion during our May meeting, for early childhood prevention courses on vaping.

Cristina Perez discussed the establishment of Statewide Lunch and Learn events, in response to the identified need of additional training and resource sharing as a number one priority. In the future, we will be establishing regional lunch and learns and will be contacting those that have shown interest in presenting.

Statewide Lunch and Learns:

These events are scheduled for July, October, December 2025 as a way to keep momentum going in between collaborative meetings.

The July Lunch and Learn included presenters **Bikers Against Child Abuse (B.A.C.A.)** and had a total of 127 Attendees.



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The next scheduled Lunch and Learn will take place on **October 2025** with presenter, Dr. Jay Reeve, CEO of Apalachee Center, with services in the Northwest region. Dr. Reeve serves as the chair on the Commission of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders. This Commission played a key role in the creation of the Regional Behavioral Health Collaborative. During this session, Dr. Reeve will share insights into the goals, as well as the vision, of the Interagency Collaboration moving forward.

Statewide Location Preference of Future Collaboratives:

Based on feedback from the survey results, for the Southern Region, the majority preferred a centralized meeting location. These meetings will resume in-person beginning January 2026. We also intend to have some meetings in Monroe County.

The presentation was shared with all members on the Southern Regional Collaborative email distribution list.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

An opportunity was provided for Public Comment.

No public comment.

VIII CLOSING REMARKS

Lourdes Dorado-Rubio discussed future quarterly collaborative meetings to include agency specific presentations and thank everyone for attending.

Cristina Perez announced the next Meeting will be held on November 13, 2025, 10:30 am-12:30 pm virtually, FAR notice and registration information will be distributed.

IX ADJOURN

Cristina Perez adjourned the Southern Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration at 11:41 a.m.



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Name	Organization
Perez, Cristina	DCF SAMH
Dorado, Lourdes	DCF SAMH
Castro, Melanie	DCF SAMH
Leeanne Sacino	Florida Coalition to End Homelessness
Tormo, Jesus	Agape Network
Swann, Tarrah	CHI
Taja Rivers	Agency for Persons with Disabilities
Patrick Heidemann	Disability Rights Florida
Feuer, Aaron	11th Judicial Circuit
Ubeda, Raylin	State of Florida Dept. of Children and Families Adult Protective Services
Bryant, Tara J	Optum
Danny Blanco	WestCare Village South
James, Harlee	DCF
Marcella Cruz	Jewish Community Services of South Florida
Megan Buckner	SUNSHINE HEALTH, CMS
Barbara Suarez	Alliance for Aging, Inc.
Stephen Zuckerman	SFBHN/TMSF
Cuba, Lianie	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Mayelin B. Canizares	Keratty Hospital Miami
Maureen Dunleavy	Guidance/Care Center, Inc.
Perez, Claudio	Agape Network
Johanna D. Macfarlane	Baptist Health South Florida
Tampa Stephanie (Unverified)	Warrior project
Blackerby, John	City of Miami Police
Soto, Maricarmen	Community Health of South FL
Sandra McQueen-Baker	Fresh Start of Miami Dade, Inc
Whalen, Mark	Indivior
Douglas Rosales	Miami Recovery Project
Nusrat	New Horizons CMHC
Laura M. Naredo, MS, CHC, CHPC	Thriving Mind



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Mion-Araoz, Celia	Community Health of South Florida, Inc.
Aley Castano	JHS
Coffey, Tim	11th Judicial Circuit
Dominguez, Amanda (CAHSD)	Miami-Dade County
Mira, Lisette	Community Health of South Fl Inc (CHI)
Isabel Perez-Morina, Ph.D.	Advocate Program Inc
Shelton, Libby	DCF
17867788168	(Unverified)
Esther Serrano, CRPS-A	Thrivingmind
Jennifer	Tolston Law
Coello, Deyris A	United HealthCare/Optum
Martin Acebal, Yisell	DCF
Salazar, Robert	Carelon Behavioral Health
Marissa Rios	Citrus Health Network, Inc.
Tania Jorge	Catholic Charities
Tampa Stephanie	Warrior project
Amy Beeler	Guidance/Care Center
Derek S. Moore, LCSW, CRPS-A	Thriving Mind of South Florida
Thomas, Valoria	Department of Children and Families
Elvira Higinio	Goodwill Industries of South Florida
Spall, Christopher M	Optum BH
Ashton Sanchez	Citrus Family Care Network
Joquetta Batista	Fresh Start of Miami Dade, Inc
Lt. Leila Perez Golden Beach PD	Golden Beach Police Department
Caceres, Bianca	CHI
ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZMAN	Larkin Community Hospital
L. Viviani	GBD
Miguel Hasbun	Larkin Community Hospital
Orlando Castro	Larkin Community Hospital
Suzanne Rodriguez	Baptist Health South Florida
Crucita Martinez	Larkin Community Hospital
Suzanne J. Rodriguez	Baptist Health South Florida



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Tamsen (Unverified)	Warrior project
Stacy Darrigan	Pro Se Power
Crucita Martinez	Larkin Community Hospital
Michael Tomczak	ABA Centers of Florida
Angie F. Kemmer	Baptist Health South Florida
Turienzo, Ashley M.	LARKIN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
Tamara, Peer Bridger, POTM	Fresh Start of Miami-Dade, Inc.
Suzy Castro	Nicklaus Children's Hospital
John W. Newcomer, MD	SFBHN/TMSF
riverofgold	Self
Gillis, Christy	Community Development Administrator
Tiffany Montero	Agape Network
Pickle, Devona	AHCA
Susan Holtzman	NAMI Miami-Dade County
Mathis, Quanekia	Community Health of South Florida, Inc.
Aley Castano	JHS
LIBERATO	Florida City Police Department
Winters, Heather	Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office