Northwest Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration

October 20th, 2026, 11:00am-1:00pm EST
Microsoft Teams
Virtual

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance:
Virtual Total= 86
Full Attendee List is Provided in Appendix A

Hosts/Facilitators: Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) – Mark Sherrod, Regional Collaboration Coordinator; April Busby, Regional Operations Supervisor; Shaleeah Marshall, Regional SAMH Director.

Presenters:

- **Timothy Buehner,** Medicaid Program Administrator for Behavioral Health Policy, Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA)
- **Linda Donar**, Northwest Regional Operations Manager, Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)
- **Ashley Sellers**, Community Outreach Coordinator, Jackson County Sheriff Office (JCSO), Community Outreach Coordinator

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mark Sherrod called the Northwest Region Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration meeting to order at 11:00 AM EST.

II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Shaleeah "Shay" Garcia welcomed the attendees.

III. PRESENTATION – (AHCA) AGENCY FOR HEALTH CARE ADMINISTRATION

Timothy Buehner, Medicaid Program Administrator for Behavioral Health Policy, AHCA

Overview and Updates on Key Initiatives:

- The Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) provided updates on recent legislative developments and ongoing initiatives focused on strengthening behavioral health services, expanding housing supports, improving psychiatric treatment access, and securing federal Medicaid reimbursement.

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Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric (SIPP) Program – Tiered Rate Structure

- The Legislature directed AHCA to implement a tiered rate structure for the Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric Program (SIPP).
- The new structure will align reimbursement rates with recipient acuity and the complexity of care required.
- Higher rates will be available for youth with more complex health conditions or greater treatment needs.
- Anticipated implementation: January 1, 2027, in conjunction with the new SIPP rates.

Housing Services Through Medicaid Waivers

- AHCA is developing Medicaid waivers to continue housing-related services following the expiration of the previous program.
- Planned services include housing tenancy services and support services for individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming unhoused.
- AHCA is preparing to submit the waivers to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for consideration.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)

- AHCA previously submitted a State Plan Amendment to CMS to establish coverage for CCBHC services.
- Because the Legislature did not provide funding for the program during the previous legislative session, AHCA is exploring alternative approaches to obtain federal authorization.
- The agency continues working with Legislature to pursue future funding for implementation.

Institutions for Mental Disease (IMD) Waiver

- AHCA is continuing to work with CMS on the review and approval of a previously submitted waiver.
- The proposed waiver would support residential psychiatric and substance use disorder treatment for youth and adults for stays of up to 90 days.
- Currently, similar services may be available through the managed care in lieu of services program, but coverage is limited to stays of up to 15 days per month.

- AHCA is also working with Legislature to secure funding during the next legislative session.

Mobile Crisis Response Services – Federal Reimbursement

- Mobile crisis response services are currently available through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and, as an ad hoc service, through most Medicaid health plans.
- AHCA and DCF are working to secure federal reimbursement for eligible services provided to Medicaid recipients through an administrative claiming process.
- Under this approach, agencies will submit quarterly invoices to the federal government reflecting eligible service costs.
- Mobile crisis providers will not be required to submit individual Medicaid claims. DCF and AHCA headquarters will coordinate the reimbursement process.

Question & Answers:

- Regional Collaboration Coordinator, Mark Sherrod, opened the floor for questions.
- There were no questions.

IV. PRESENTATION – (APD) AGENCY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Linda Donar, Northwest Regional Operations Manager, APD

Overview of Services:

Who APD Serves

- Serves more than 60,000 individuals with developmental disabilities.

More than 37,000 individuals are enrolled in the iBudget Florida Waiver programApplying for APD Services

- Applicants must be at least 3 years old, live in Florida, and have a qualifying developmental disability.
- Applicants must submit an application and documentation supporting their diagnosis, identity, and Florida residency.
- Applications can be submitted online, by mail, or in person.

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Priority for Services APD uses seven priority categories to determine placement on the waiting list for waiver services. Priorities include:

- Individuals experiencing a crisis, such as homelessness or unsafe living conditions.
- Children transitioning out of the child welfare system.
- Individuals with intensive needs or caregivers who can no longer provide care.
- Individuals with caregivers age 60 or older.
- Students preparing to graduate from high school.
- Other eligible adults and children who do not meet higher-priority criteria.

iBudget Florida Waiver provides services and support to help eligible individuals:

- Maintain safe housing.
- Participate in meaningful daily activities.
- Access medical supplies and equipment.
- Obtain transportation and other needed services.

Individual and Family Supports (IFS)

- Provides supplemental funding for critical, temporary needs.
- May help cover services such as personal support, transportation, employment assistance, therapies, and residential support.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Comprehensive Managed Care (ICMC)

- A joint initiative involving APD and AHCA. Expanded statewide in October 2025.
- Provides medical, long-term care, and community-based services through a managed care model.
- Participation is voluntary.

Hope Florida

- Connects individuals and families with community resources through Hope Navigators.
- Encourages collaboration among government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and private partners.
- Helps individuals identify resources and work toward greater independence.

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APD helps individuals with developmental disabilities access services, supports, and resources to improve their quality of life and independence.

For community partners, the key is to connect individuals and families with APD early, understand eligibility and waiver priorities, and coordinate with other agencies to address housing, transportation, employment, and daily support needs.

APD Contact: 1-866-273-2273 Website: apd.myflorida.com

Question & Answers:

Category 1 Crisis Eligibility and Hospital Discharge

Question: (Latina Germany-Godfrey-DCF) If a court requires an APD-eligible individual to be discharged from a hospital within 30 days, and the individual may become homeless, would this qualify as a Category 1 crisis?

Answer: (Linda Donar-APD) Yes. Individuals being discharged from facilities such as Florida State Hospital may qualify for a crisis application under the homelessness criteria if they have no alternative placement. APD's Northwest Region team may coordinate discharge assistance, even when an individual plans to return to another region of the state.

Medicaid Eligibility and Social Security Benefits During Discharge Planning

Question: (Latina Germany-Godfrey-DCF) How can individuals who do not yet have active Medicaid or Social Security benefits be considered for placement when some regions indicate that benefits must already be active?

Answer: (Linda Donar-APD) Each case is individualized based on the person's institutional stay, previous benefits, and discharge needs. APD should be involved early in the discharge planning process to help coordinate placement and clarify benefit eligibility. APD can run Social Security reports to help determine an individual's benefit status. APD can run Social Security reports to help determine an individual's benefit status. Starting the Social Security application before discharge can help prevent delays. Once placement is identified, the receiving group home may take the individual to the Social Security office with discharge paperwork to activate benefits.

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Number of Individuals on the APD Waiting List

Question: (Nancy O'Farrell-NAMI Tallahassee) How many individuals are currently on the APD waiting list?

Answer: (Linda Donar-APD) The number is below 20,000 but changes daily.

APD Initiatives to Reduce the Waiting List

Question: (Nancy O'Farrell-NAMI Tallahassee) Is APD pursuing additional funding, staffing, or legislative support to reduce the waiting list?

Answer: (Linda Donar-APD) Yes. APD stated that efforts to address the waiting list are ongoing. The agency conducts an annual status survey, ensuring individuals on the pre-enrollment list are contacted within each 12-month period. The survey helps identify changing needs, including:

- Caregivers who are aging or becoming unable to provide care.
- Students approaching the end of school-based services.
- Individuals whose support needs have increased.

Individuals may move into higher-priority categories as their circumstances change, allowing APD to identify those with more immediate needs. At the same time, new applications continue to come in, making the waiting list difficult to reduce.

V. PRESENTATION – PEER SUPPORT SERVICES WORKGROUP UPDATE AND SUCCESS STORY

Ashley Sellers, Outreach Coordinator, JCSO

Overview Summary:

- The Peer Support Services Workgroup continues to expand across the Northwest Region, bringing local perspectives and community-driven solutions to advance three primary goals: increase community engagement and awareness, strengthen the peer workforce, and build infrastructure.
- Community Engagement and Awareness: Hope Above Fear in Escambia County promotes substance-use awareness and supports youth, young adults, and families affected by substance misuse. NAMI contributes through educational programs,

including the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP), which helps participants develop personal wellness and recovery goals through peer learning.

- Legislative Advocacy: Melissa Bottorf of Florida Springs Hospital's Bridge Program has contacted local lawmakers to explore participation in delegation meetings. These meetings will provide opportunities to share lived experiences, highlight local concerns—including overdose rates, incarceration, community impact, and costs—and engage elected officials. Workgroup members have been assigned to districts, with the next meeting scheduled for November 3rd, 2026, to finalize the delegation meeting agenda. Three priority topics were identified: lived experience, addiction recovery cost-benefit analysis, and certification processes.
- Building Infrastructure: Offentsive, a Recovery Community Organization serving Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, provides resocialization classes at Camp "O" and offers peer-informed observations to support community interactions. The organization also hosted a Santa Rosa County Town Hall to discuss local challenges and develop life-saving solutions.
- Law Enforcement Collaboration and Peer Workforce Development: The Escambia County Sheriff's Office supports the Offentsive Project through a Peer-Informed Crisis Response and Community Referral pathway, connecting individuals with Certified Recovery Peer Specialists for continued support and assistance accessing treatment, recovery, mental health services, housing, benefits, and other resources. Additional paid peer positions, including CRPS roles in Jackson County, demonstrate progress toward expanding the regional peer workforce and strengthening community partnerships.

SUCCESS STORY
Ashley Sellers, Community Outreach Coordinator, JCSO

Recovery Success Story

Ashley Sellers, Certified Recovery Peer Specialist and Community Outreach Coordinator, shares her journey from incarceration and personal hardship to sustained recovery, professional growth, and community leadership.

- A Chance at Change: Following her arrest in Bay County on November 2, 2018, Ashley participated in the LifeLine program while incarcerated. A Certified Recovery Peer Specialist supported her during and after her release, including throughout a year of house arrest.

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- Building a Foundation for Recovery: Ashley maintained her health and sobriety through peer support, Celebrate Recovery, sponsorship, accountability partners, journaling, church, and professional medical care. Assistance with basic needs helped her establish independence while raising four children as a single mother.
- Finding Purpose and Community: Through family, community service, faith, and recovery relationships, Ashley developed a strong support network and rebuilt her life while navigating challenges, including Hurricane Michael and COVID-19.
- Turning Recovery into Service: In 2022, Ashley began working as a Peer Specialist with DISC Village, Inc., earning her Certified Recovery Peer Specialist credential and facilitating groups in communities and jails. She also became a leader in Celebrate Recovery and a Wellness Ambassador for the Peer Support Coalition of Florida.
- Making a Community Impact: In 2024, Ashley joined the Jackson County Sheriff's Office as a Community Outreach Coordinator, helping connect individuals in need with resources and services. She also became President of the Jackson County Optimist Club, focusing on supporting local youth.

Key Takeaway: Ashley's story demonstrates how peer support, access to basic needs, meaningful relationships, and community resources can help individuals achieve sustained recovery. Her journey highlights the power of lived experience to inspire hope, strengthen communities, and help others find their own chance at change.

Question & Answers:

Peer Support Services Workgroup

Comment: (Nancy O'Farrel-NAMI Tallahassee): Nancy discussed funding and programs serving children from kindergarten through age 22, including potential opportunities to bring services to Jackson County and other counties. She requested contact information to explore collaboration.

Response: (Ashley Sellers-JCSO) Ashley invited Nancy to share her email address in the chat to facilitate follow-up.

Comment: (Dr. Twanna House-NAMI Tallahassee) Dr. House commended Ashley Sellers for sharing her recovery story and highlighted how her success reflects the goal of expanding peer support employment opportunities in settings such as sheriff's offices, emergency rooms, hospitals, and doctors' offices. Dr. House also discussed the organization's

commitment to peer-led recovery and Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) programming.

Response: (Ashley Sellers-JCSO) thanked Dr. House for the encouraging remarks.

Question: (Kimberly Comer-SWFN) asked Ashley whether she was involved in the statewide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) initiative, which focuses on crisis-related training? Kimberly explained that she serves on the statewide CIT board and that one of its goals is to engage peer specialists and the individuals they serve in statewide efforts. She confirmed that she had emailed Ashley her contact information and encouraged her to connect to explore opportunities for collaboration across communities.

Response: (Ashley Sellers-JCSO) expressed interest in both the CIT initiative and the development of Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs), indicating that she planned to contact Kimberly Comer.

VI. UPDATES AND NEXT STEPS

Mark Sherrod discussed Updates and Next Steps for the Northwest BHIC

Statewide Trends & Gaps 2026:

- Florida's six Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration initiatives continue to strengthen partnerships, address service gaps, and improve coordination across the behavioral health system. Statewide priorities include coordinated crisis response, regional workgroups, and collaboration across the crisis care continuum. Two major challenges remain: housing stability and workforce capacity, including housing shortages, homelessness, placement barriers, staffing shortages, recruitment and retention difficulties, background screening barriers, and limited peer support capacity. Moving forward, the focus will be on strengthening regional and statewide collaboration and creating seamless warm handoffs to connect individuals with the appropriate level of care and prevent them from falling through gaps between systems.
- The Northwest Region has launched the Housing Access & Support Workgroup, which has identified three goals and is moving from identifying housing barriers toward building practical regional solutions. Key priorities include creating a shared housing and landlord directory, strengthening landlord partnerships, expanding employment-to-housing pathways, and addressing the shortage of emergency shelter resources.

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- Based on 31 survey responses received so far, the workgroup is identifying key housing barriers and actions that could improve access. Additional survey participation is encouraged to ensure future decisions and the workgroup's mission reflect a broader range of regional needs. Community partners were invited to complete the survey, recommend additional workgroups, or join existing workgroups to contribute their expertise and strengthen collaboration across Northwest Florida.

- After the April 2026 Collaborative meeting we sent out a form for interested agencies and organizations to fill out their contact information to be shared in an interagency contact list. The form included a consent to share information. As of today, we have 52 organizations that have completed the form with over 68 contacts on the list. As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen regional collaboration and improve interagency communication, the goal of this resource is to help members more easily identify appropriate points of contact, improve referrals and coordination, and increase awareness of available programs and services across the Northwest Region. The NWR Collaborative plans to distribute the shared contact list in January 2027 to members who have provided consent to share their contact information.

- Next Northwest Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration: January 21st, 2027, virtually via Microsoft Teams.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mark Sherrod opened the floor for public comment.

No Public Comments.

VIII. ADJOURN

Mark Sherrod adjourned the meeting at 12:13 PM EST.

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Appendix A

Name	Organization
Alexis Thrasher	Department of Children and Families
Alicia Stanley	State of Florida/Agency for Persons w Disabilities'
Alison Fulford	Department of Juvenile Justice
Amanda King	Lakeview Center
Amber Oconnell	NAMI Tallahassee Inc.
Andy Cornett	Doorways of NW FL
April Busby	Department of Children and Families
April Ryan	Advantage Aging Solutions-Area Agency on Aging North Florida
Ashley Sellers	Jackson County Sheriff's Office
Autumn McAllister	Lakeview Center
Avalon Mallory	211 Northwest Florida
Bonnie Barlow	Bridgeway Center, Inc.
Bradley Savary	Wakulla County Sheriff's Office
Brittellen Luciano	SEDNET
Candace Boldin-Hunt	NWF Health Network
Christina Bertera	NWFHN
Christine Wolfe	Department of Children and Families
Cindy Peaden	Santa Rosa County School District
Corinne Whitlock	Access Behavioral Health
Cristina Perez	Florida Department of Children and Families
Dalymar Campsruiz	Department of Children and Families
Danielle Sandow	Journeypure
Deb White	Metro Treatment of Florida, L.P.
Denise Manassa	CDAC
Diveka Anderson	Department of Children and Families
Drew Hild	PanCare of Florida, Inc.
Emme Ledbetter	Department of Children and Families
Harlee James	Department of Children and Families
Hayley Hamilton	Department of Children and Families
Isabel De La Luz	Lakeview Center- CAT

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Jake Shuler	Calhoun Liberty Hospital EMS
Janet Garrett	Nonie's Place
Jawid Sultany	Department of Children and Families
Jennifer Crutchfield	14th Circuit Court Administration
Jesse Kemper	Department of Children and Families
Joe Dmitrovic	Statewide Recovery Community Organization
Joe Anson	Recovery Opportunity Collective (ROC)
John Banaghan	Department of Juvenile Justice
Kaitlynn Cannon	Children's Home Society - M-Power
Kelli Hernandez	Homelessness & Housing Alliance
Kim Fischer	Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County
Kimberly Statham	Whistleblowers of America
Kimberly Comer	SFWN
Kirk Hall	Florida Agency for Health Care Administration
Kristi Reynolds	PanCare of Florida
Larry McFarland	Bridgeway Center, Inc
Latina Germany-Godfrey	Florida Department of Children & Families
Laurie Gerhard	Self
Laurinda Andujar	Department of Children and Families
Linda Donar	Agency for Persons with Disabilities
Lindsay Kerwin	Department of Children and Families
Lori York	Elevance Health
Mark Sherrod	Department of Children and Families
Melanie Spoon	Life Management Center
Melissa Warren	Florida Springs Wellness Recovery
Melissa Smith	Bay District Schools
Melissa Sidoti	Fl DCF - NWR
Michelle Schilling	DOH-Escambia
Mylisa Lee	Department of Children and Families
Nancy O'Farrell	NAMI Tallahassee Inc
Necia Little	Department of Children and Families
Regina Pleas	Department of Children and Families
Rhonda Hall	Holmes District Schools
Rusty Holmes	SEDNET 2A

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Senie Thomas	Department of Children and Families
Shaleeah Garcia	Department of Children and Families
Shannon Massingale	NWF Health Network
Sharron Washington	NWF Health Network
Shayma Salman	Department of Veterans Affairs
Stephanie Brunson	Apalachee Center
Stephanie Guidry	Lakeview of Walton County
Susan Dove	Florida Department of Corrections
Tammy Byrer	Opening Doors NWFL
Tim Potter	NWR ESS
Timothy Buehner	Agency for Health Care Administration
Tina Beaulieu	Elevance
Tonja Odom	Department Children & Families
Tonya Harrison	Department of Children and Families
Tracie Moorer	NWF Health Network
Tracy Peters	Doorways of Northwest Florida
Tracy Shelby	Department of Juvenile Justice
Twanna House	NAMI Emerald Coast
Veronica Rosa	Lakeview Center
Veronica Coward	Guided Futures
Victoria Nott	NWF Health Network
Zoha Khan	Department of Children and Families