

NEW JERSEY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PLANNING COUNCIL

Minutes

February 11, 2026, 10:00 am

This meeting was conducted exclusively through MS Teams video teleconference & conference call

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Dial-in Number: +1 609-300-7196, PIN: 306216820#

Notices of the meeting were sent to the Asbury Park Press, The Times (of Trenton), and the Bergen Record.

Participants:

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Heather Simms (Chair) | Donna Migliorino (DMHAS) | Suzanne Borys (DMHAS) |
| Jennifer Rutberg (DoA) | Michael Ippolitti | Kurt Baker |
| Angela Calzone | Darlema Bey | Donna Spencer (HMFA) |
| Francis Walker (YJC) | Jessica Groelly (DoC) | Brian Harris (NJAHAMA) |
| Elisabeth Marchese | Chris Morrison (DoH) | Joe Gutstein |
| Wyndee Davis (CSOC) | Tom Pyle | Julia Barugel |
| Donna Spencer (HMFA) | Angela Calzone | Elisabeth Marchese |
| Suzanne Smith | Winifred Chain | |

DMHAS, CSOC, DDD, DMAHS, DoAS & DoH Staff:

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clarence Pearson | Karen Wapner | Susannah Combs |
| Mark Kruszczyński | Nancy Edouard (DoA) | Helen Staton |
| Shenal Pugh | Lori Faye (DFD) | Ben Magnuson (CSCOC) |
| Margie Agudelo (CSOC) | Anne Pushkal (CSOC) | Harry Reyes (presenter) |
| David Kensler (presenter) | Sucharitha Reddy (DMAHAS) | |

Guests:

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Rachel Morgan | Nina Smuklavskaya | Elena Kravitz |
| Lasheema Sanders-Edwards | Anne Smullen-Theiling | Diane Litterer |
| Shelly Robin Weiss | Lisa Frederico | Anna Guida |
| Alana Andrews | Bill Morgan | Sid and Maurice |
| John Tkacz | Serrena Zuppardo | Jacqueline Caban |
| Matt Camarda (NAMI) | Ken Rauer | Nicole Nicodemus (NJ DoC) |

I. Administrative Issues/Correspondence (Heather Simms)

- A. Attendance, 20/34, 58% attendance, quorum *exceeded*.
- B. Official welcome of DHS Commissioner Cha
- B. Minutes of January 14, 2026 meeting, approved.

II. Housing Continuum Expansion (David Kensler, DMHAS)

- A. Pilot Program in Essex County (NJ Opioid Settlement, Housing Continuum Expansion, PowerPoint slide deck)
 - 1. DMHAS partnered with Vital Strategies and Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC)
 - a. Recommendations
 - b. Consumer advisory Board
 - c. Model of Care: Low barriers for treatment & harm reduction services

- d. Pilot Program Design: low barriers, program evaluation, participant/staff incentives
- e. Harm reduction recovery housing: 20 transitional beds, 24/7 staffing, overdose prevention, connections to subsidies
- f. Provider Certification: mandatory training, free technical assistance

III. Overview of Community Support Services (CSS) and DMHAS Supported Housing Resources (Harry Reyes, DMHAS)

- A. Request for vacancies, who can fill them. Must be cleared with the DMHAS Housing Office and OREPPPO.
 - 1. Diversion backfill openings are considered first.
 - 2. Rental Subsidies are very carefully considered by DMHAS
 - a. Priority to people leaving state hospital, then
 - b. People leaving A+ housing
 - 3. Consumers have increased choice—just because there is a vacancy it doesn't mean that the individual must accept that vacancy.
- B. Fair Market rates have not been increased yet, nor has DCA's.
- C. Comments of Presenter
 - 1. 3000 are enrolled in State subsidized rental subsidies
 - 2. These remain funded to the individual for as long as they qualify, not for only two years
 - 3. These are different subsidies "DCA subsidies" which are funded by HUD and administered by DCA
 - 4. There is no specified waiting list for these state rental subsidies
 - 5. After an applicant has applied but had no luck after 30 days receiving a subsidy from that application, the applicant must reapply
 - 6. There is an annual turnover of 10% to 15% of recipients of these subsidies, due to death or "graduation", suggesting about 300 to 450 subsidies become available per year.
 - 7. Loved ones being discharged from State hospitals receive priority consideration for receipt of these subsidies
 - 8. The approval process for State subsidies is now more centralized through Harry's office.
 - 9. Cuts are coming to these State funded subsidies.
- C. Q&A
 - 1. Q: About how many subsidies? A: About 3,000.
 - 2. DMHAS has transferred many individuals successfully from DMHAS subsidies to DCA Subsidies
 - 3. Q: How many on the waiting list? A: DMHAS does not keep an active waiting list.

IV. Mobile Crisis Outreach Response Teams (MCORT) Juliet Buritica (CSP)

Overview See PowerPoint Presentation "CSP and MCORT" previously shared via email.

- A. Went Live in March 2025
- B. Operational in all counties in NJ
- C. What is MCORT?
- D. Goals of MCORT: 24/7 response to de-escalate situations and support individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use crises

- 1. MCORT does not involve screeners nor law enforcement
- E. How will MCORT respond?
 - 1. Call 988
 - 2. Carelon Behavioral Health
 - a. Receive request via Bamboo
 - b. Accept dispatch
 - c. Arrive on scene within one hour
 - d. Follow-up services within 72 hours
- F. How can you support MCORT?
 - 1. Inform people served by your program to 988 and request MCORT
 - 2. Provide MCORT with updated information about your services.
 - 3. Facilitate a warm transfer when a referral is referred by MCORT
- G. Q&A
 - 1. Q: Is this for adults? A: Yes, persons 18 and older
 - 2. Q: Does MCORT dispatch to a family member? A: MCORT cannot do wellness checks, but if a family member calls 988 and asks for MCORT, then they will be dispatched.

V. System Partner Updates (Heather Simms)

Going forward all system partners are requested to provide the Council with brief, written updates by the Friday prior to the next BHPC meeting. Those updates will be provided to the Council prior to the meeting; this will give Council members an opportunity to pose questions to the system partners in a timely manner.

- A. Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Suzanne Borys).
 - 1. Addictions
 - a. Synar
 - i. Correction plan needed due to high violation rate
 - ii. DMHAS developing a budget from State funds to make a plan to reduce youth tobacco sales.
 - 2. Mental health
 - a. Extension requested on BG Implementation Report
 - i. Tables regarding readmission to be submitted
 - b. MH Application has been approved, but we await SUPTRS approval for joint block grant application.
- B. Children’s Systems of Care Wyndee Davis, DCF CSOC).
 - 1. Infant and early childhood symposium, on 3/5/26
 - 2. [Navigating Birth to Five Practice: The Ports of Entry of Responsiveness & Readiness A symposium of ...](#)
- C. Division of Developmental Disabilities (Jonathan Sabin)
 - 1. New Jersey Human Services is pleased to announce the launch of the redesigned Office of Program Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) website. This update is part of Human Services' ongoing commitment to transparency, offering information in a clearer and more user-friendly format. Visitors will find expanded, easy-to-navigate content detailing OPIA's role and responsibilities, including what to expect during investigative and compliance processes, as well as insights into how the office works to protect individuals. The site features a dedicated section for

consumers and families, explaining their rights, what occurs during an investigation, and how OPIA ensures services are delivered safely, appropriately, and in compliance with state and federal standards. Additionally, the website enhances access to data on incidents, oversight activities, and compliance trends, reinforcing our role in enhancing public understanding. We invite you to explore the new OPIA website and share it with colleagues and stakeholders who may benefit from this information, as we continue to uphold accountability and trust across New Jersey Human Services providers. The OPIA has also launched its own email listserv as another way to keep stakeholders updated on important news and information. [Visit the OPIA Website](#)

D. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) (Tatyana Brown, not present, excused):

1. DVRS is currently seeking licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, and substance use disorder (SUD) specialists to join our growing provider network. Additionally, we are especially interested in professionals who are proficient in American Sign Language (ASL) to better serve our deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers. Together, we can expand access to care and improve outcomes for the communities we serve. Please have any interested parties contact me for additional information: dvrsmentalhealth@dol.nj.gov

E. Department of Education (Maurice Ingram): Present.

1. Updated guidance on internet enabled devices in public schools in the 2026-2027 year.
See

<https://www.nj.gov/education/broadcasts/2026/jan/28/ReleaseofUpdatedGuidelinesonStudentUseofInternetEnabledDevices.pdf>

2. New DoE Commissioner, Dr. Lily Laux

F. Division of Aging (Jennifer Rutberg, present):

1. No updates at this time.

G. Youth Justice Commission (YJC) (formerly JJC), Francis Walker, present

1. In process of changing drug screening program, to lower false positives

H. Department of Corrections (Jessica Groelly, Christina Nicodemus, present). No updates

1. No updates at this time

I. NJ Div. of Medical Assistance and Health Services (NJ Family Care/State Medicaid) (S. Pugh, Present).

1. Integration consumer advocate meeting. Now will be monthly. The public is welcome to advocate for people impacted by BH Integration

J. Department of Health: (Chris Morrison):

1. Transformation to Academic Psychiatry: Ancora, then Trenton Psych and Greystone
 - a. Forging enhanced connections with the medical education community.
2. MH Simulation Lab: DOH's visit to Rowan University.
3. Greystone's 150th Anniversary

- 4. State Hospital CEO Roundtable

- K. NJAMHAA (Jada Abdulla, Brian Harris, preset):
 - 1. Upcoming 75th Anniversary and Spring Conference

- L. Division of Family Development (Lori Faye, present): No updates.

- M. Supported Housing Association (Kate Kelly), not present:

- N. NJ County Mental Health Administrators Association (Elisabeth Marchese, present).
 - 1. No updates
 - 2. Middlesex County 3/25/26, Anti-Stigma conference

- O. NJ Hospital Association (Deena Tampi) not present).

- P. NJ Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJ HMFA), (Donna Spencer, present)).
 - 1. Amendments to the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Qualified Allocation Plan were adopted by OAL on February 2nd. Tax Credits are sold to provide equity to construct affordable housing projects. Among the changes are 1) emerging developer set aside, 2) tenant protections for projects located near warehouse facilities, 3) points for M/WBE developers

VI. Open Public Comment and Announcements:

- A. Public Comment

- B. Announcements:
 - 1. NJ CRISIS PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST SUPERVISOR TRAINING.
 Training Information The New Jersey Crisis Peer Support Specialist Supervisor Training is an online, 4-session training funded by the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services under a SAMHSA TTI grant. The training is designed for peer support specialist (PSS) supervisors working in the New Jersey Crisis System of Care. Additionally, PSS who aspire to be supervisors can also benefit from the training. Trainees will receive training on the competencies needed to supervise PSS working in crisis environments such as Early Intervention Support Services (EISS), screening centers, MCORT, and other settings where people seek and receive assistance for behavioral health crises. Registration*:
 *Please register below for one cohort only:

 Cohort 1: 3/3, 3/5, 3/10, 3/12 @ 9:30-12pm
<https://surveygoldcloud.com/s/E7B9985FE2114B98/345.htm>

 Cohort 2: 3/19, 3/24, 3/26, 3/31 @ 9:30-12pm
<https://surveygoldcloud.com/s/E7B9985FE2114B98/346.htm>

 Cohort 3: 4/6, 4/8, 4/14, 4/16 @ 9:30-12pm
<https://surveygoldcloud.com/s/E7B9985FE2114B98/347.htm>

V. **Adjournment:** Heather Simms: Time: 11:56: am.

A. Next meeting: 3/11/26 10:00 am –noon.

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B. Future Agenda Items/Additional Items for Meetings in 2025

1. Use of psychedelics / psilocybin for mental health disorders (Connie Greene's suggestion made 12/10/25)
3. Quality Improvement Plan (QIP): (Connie Greene)
4. NJ DoE Threat Assessment Protocols
5. Pretrial Services in Camden County
7. JJC Discussion (Filomena DiNuzzo)
6. DVR (Tatyana Brown)
7. Presentation on SUD prevention efforts at County Jails?
8. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) (Suzanne B.)
9. AIR, Youth Suicide Prevention (kurt@air.ngo)
10. SUD and the JJC (Francis Walker, JJC)
11. Experiences of Consumers in SUD Crisis
12. Immigration and Mental Health (suggested by A. Lewis, 01/14/26).
13. Grief Counselling for People with Lived Experienced (D. Bey, suggested 1/14/26)
14. Attorney General Office to Speak About Mental Health Courts (D. Bey, suggested 1/14/26)
15. Having Peer Coalition at the Council (Suggested by Elena Kravitz 1/14/26).
16. Start Services (NJ DDD) consultative service, proactive to mitigate mental health emergencies, short term services (Suggested by Elena Kravitz 1/14/26).
17. Information for consumers with Dual Diagnosis (DDD and MH/SUD) (Suggested by Janet Martinez 1/14/26)
18. Outcomes for individuals.