

Minutes

Behavioral Health Council

Date May 20, 2025

Time 1:00 PM – 2:45 PM

Meeting called to order by Dr. Christina Finello, Esq., Executive Director, Behavioral Health Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Commonwealth Representatives:

1. Deputy Secretary of Policy and Planning, Meghna Patel on behalf of Secretary of Policy and Planning, Akbar Hossain
2. Secretary of the Department of Human Services, Dr. Valerie Arkoosh
3. Secretary of the Department of Health, Dr. Debra Bogen
4. Commissioner of Pennsylvania Insurance Department, Michael Humphreys
5. Secretary of the Department of Aging, Jason Kavulich
6. Secretary of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, Dr. Latika Davis-Jones
7. Special Assistant to the Secretary, Cathy Hall, MPA on behalf of the acting Secretary of the Department of Education, Dr. Carrie Rowe
8. Spec. Asst. to Adj. Gen. Richard Hamp on behalf of Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Major General John Pippy
9. Policy and Legislative Affairs Office Director, Captain Leslie Barr on behalf of Commissioner of Pennsylvania State Police, Colonel Christopher Paris
10. Regional Licensed Psychologist Manager, Corrections, Dr. Elicia Stein on behalf of Secretary of the Department of Corrections, Dr. Laurel Harry
11. Secretary of the Department of State, Al Schmidt
12. Exec. Dir. Rural Dev. Council, Western Reg. Dir. PA Dept. of Agriculture, Mr. Mark Critz, on behalf of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Russell Redding
13. Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Kirsten Kenyon
14. Bureau Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Dept. of Labor and Industry, Denise Verchimak, on behalf of Secretary of Department of Labor and Industry, Nancy Walker
15. Digital Services Director at the Governor's Office, Sadie Smiles on behalf of Director of Digital Strategy at the Governor's Office, Annie Newman
16. Pennsylvania Attorney General's Safe2Say Program Director, Brittney Kline
17. Deputy Secretary, Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Jennifer Smith

Representatives with lived or living experiences and family members:

18. Robert Hamilton, MPPM - Westmoreland DHS Dir.; Formerly homeless veteran & person in long-term recovery
19. Kate Favata - Community Engagement Manager, Crossroads, Treatment Advocate
20. Jennifer Wilt - Parent of a loved one with mental illness, President NAMI of Cumberland, and Perry Counties

County Representatives:

21. Tina Clymer, County Mental Health Office representing Carbon, Monroe, and Pike counties
22. Ryan Hogan, Single County Authority from Luzerne County
23. Kristin Varner, Single County Authority from Dauphin County
24. Lynn Deardorff, Area Agency on Aging from Adams County
25. Dr. Shannah Gillam, Area Agency on Aging from Allegheny County

Clinical Representatives:

26. Dr. Amy Kim, an expert in child and family behavioral healthcare
27. Dr. Margaret Jarvis, an expert in addiction medicine and substance use disorder treatments
28. Dr. Jack Todd Wahrenberger, an expert in primary healthcare
29. Dr. Wendy Ross, an expert in treating individuals with co-occurring intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism with mental illness

Legislative Representatives from the General Assembly:

30. Representative Mike Schlossberg (D) along with John O'Donnell
31. Representative Jim Struzzi (R) (Jenna McCarthy, designee)
32. Senator Maria Collett (D) along with Molly McMenamin
33. Senator Michele Brooks (R) (David Burnett, designee)

REPORTS

Dr. Finello took roll call. Deputy Secretary Patel introduced the topic for the meeting, which was older adults and behavioral health. Deputy Secretary Patel explained that the meeting would focus on understanding the unique behavioral health challenges faced by older adults. She hoped the presentations would help to provide an appreciation of the complex behavioral health needs of older adults, will explain how behavioral health care is provided by discussing integration with medical providers and geriatric specialists. The presentation will also help us to identify system and financial challenges for older adults and devise strategies to deal with coverage gaps for middle-income older adults (not eligible for Medicaid but struggle to afford services), come up with regulatory and financial incentives for behavioral health integration, and strengthen community-based programs to reduce reliance on institutional care.

The speakers were: Secretary of the Department of Aging, Jason Kavulich; Deputy Secretary, Office of Long-Term Living, Department of Human Services, Juliet Marsala; Deputy Secretary, OMHSAS, Department of Human Services, Jennifer Smith; and Behavioral Health Policy Specialist, PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Inc. (P4A), Lynn Cooper.

Following the presentations, Dr. Finello led a facilitated discussion with questions that were given to the members of the Council before the meeting. Comments from that discussion will be incorporated into the Statewide Action Plan.

Deputy Secretary Patel ended the meeting with some closing remarks and thanked the Council members for their time.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Behavioral Health Council Meetings will take place on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 1:00 PM. Quarterly meetings will be in person. The next in-person meeting is in June. The next meeting of the Council is May 20, 2025, and it will be virtual via Teams.

NEXT MEETING

June 17, 2025, 1 PM, in the Governor's Reception Room – 2nd Floor Main Capitol Building