

Minutes

Behavioral Health Council

Date June 17, 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. 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. Kristin Varner, Single County Authority from Dauphin County
23. Lynn Deardorff, Area Agency on Aging from Adams County
24. Dr. Shannah Gillam, Area Agency on Aging from Allegheny County

Clinical Representatives:

25. Dr. Amy Kim, an expert in child and family behavioral healthcare
26. Dr. Margaret Jarvis, an expert in addiction medicine and substance use disorder treatments
27. Dr. Jack Todd Wahrenberger, an expert in primary healthcare
28. 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:

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

REPORTS

Dr. Finello took roll call. Secretary Hossain introduced the topic for the meeting, which was ensuring equity in behavioral health with an emphasis on rural populations. He explained that the meeting would focus on how we can ensure equity in behavioral health care and particularly with rural populations. Secretary Hossain hoped the presentations will provide an understanding of not only some of the issues but also some of the system level solutions to make sure people in rural areas are getting the treatment that they need. Also, the presentations will discuss some learnings around workforce development and retention, data driven policy and evaluation, and how we can develop and establish together clear metrics for assessing health equity and progress toward reducing disparities.

The speakers were: Jeanmarie Perrone, MD FACTMT, Professor, Emergency Medicine, Medical Toxicology and Addiction Medicine Initiatives; Director, Center for Addiction Medicine and Policy, University of Pennsylvania; Michael Lynch, MD, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine, University of Pittsburgh; Attending Emergency Physician and Medical Toxicologist, UPMC; Richard Neff, MD, CPE, MBA, Chief Medical Officer & Designated Institutional Official, Indiana Regional Medical Center; and Wendy Haislip, MSN, RN, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer, Indiana Regional Medical Center.

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.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is the last of our scheduled meetings. The staff of the Behavioral Health Council will now take all the information from our meetings, discussions, and other information to create a draft of the Action Plan. The members of the Council will review this draft and provide feedback.

NEXT MEETING

TBD