

NEW JERSEY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PLANNING COUNCIL
Minutes

November 12, 2025, 10:00 am

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

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

Notices of the meeting were sent to the Asbury Park Press, The Times (Trenton), Bergen Record, The Press (Pleasantville), and the Courier-Post (Cherry Hill).

Participants:

Heather Simms (Chair)	Connie Greene (Vice-Chair)	Suzanne Borys (DMHAS)
Nancy Edouard (DoA)	Jennifer Rutberg (DoA)	Maurice Ingram (DoE)
Joe Gutstein	Darlema Bay	Harry Coe
Morgan Thompson	Jonathan Sabin (DDD)	Francis Walker (JJC)
Christina Nicodemus (DoC)	Elisabeth Marchese	Susan Loughery (DoH)
Donna Spencer (NJ HMFA)	Mary Abrams (NJAMHA)	Barb Johnston

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

Yunqing Li	Zui Han	Clarence Pearson
Helen Staton	Brittany Thorne	Irina Stuchinsky
Mark Kruszczyński		

Guests:

Rachel Morgan	Alejandrina Batista	William Cole
Nina Smuklavskaya	Adam Chrono	Ann Smullen Thieling
Robin Weiss	Diane Litterer	Ken Rouer
Alana Valoy	Abby Lewis	Keith Smith
Kim Dunha		

I. Administrative Issues/Correspondence (Heather Simms)

- A. Acknowledgement of our Veterans
- A. Attendance, 18/35, 51.4% attendance, quorum *exceeded*.
- B. Minutes of September 10, 2025 meeting, approved.
- C. State Ethics Training due 10/10/25.
 - 1. Members of the BHPC/CAB are to reach out to me and/or the DMHAS Ethics Liaison staff for more details and/or assistance.

II. DMHAS Office of the Ombudsman (Susanne Mills & Dave Helfand, DMHAS)

- A. See PowerPoint presentation sent to the Council on 11/10/25
 - 1. Introductions of Susanne Mills and Dave Helfand
 - 2. Regulatory Language: See https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/providers/rulefees/regs/rulesfiles/NJAC%2010_37%20%20COMMUNITY%20MENTAL%20HEALTH%20SERVICES%20ACT.PDF

3. DMHAS gives the provider agencies and initial opportunity to respond.
4. S. Mills has been DMHAS Ombudsman since 2016, and has lived experience
 - a. Operations
 - i. Triaging calls & inquiries
 - ii. Working with Quality Control
 - iii. Direct follow-up with individual. Warm handoffs only!
5. Works with Ombudsmen at other state offices (i.e., DoH, Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities, Long Term Housing, CSOC, Office of the Public Defender, DRNJ, Community Health Law Project, etc.)
6. The Office of the Ombudsman always responds as swiftly as possible.
7. The Future
 - a. Complaint and Referral Tracking System (CARTS): DMHAS is currently designing a system that will allow more efficient tracking of inquiries and complaints. Planned for release in 2026.
 - i. Assigns and confirms follow-through occurs
 - ii. Can search history where relevant
 - iii. Determines whether multiple DMHAS staff are involved and so improves collaboration
8. Q&A
 - a. Q: What is the process by which a contracted agency should handle a complaint? What is the role of the agency's ombudsman?
A: Office of Ombudsman's works with the agency and all relevant system partners and oversight entities
 - b. Q: Is there a Program of special counseling for people with lived experience going thru bereavement? A: There are bereavement support groups. DMHAS providers do provide outpatient therapy.
 - c. Q: At our center we hear a lot of complaints from some of our members who live in residential healthcare facilities and the complaints deal with the facility they are living in. Would these complaints be appropriate to call in with? A: Complaints about Residential Facilities and Boarding homes are Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
 - d. Positive comments of R. Weiss about the Office of Ombudsman
9. DMHAS encourages people to "get the word out" about the Office of Ombudsman.
10. Office of Ombudsman works to make connections but is unable to be the case manager for specific cases.

III. CMHBG Implementation Report & URS Data Tables and Fiscal Tables
(Suzanne Borys, Yunqing Li, Prerak Patel, Mark Kruszczyński)

[Due to IT Network Outage reported by NJ OIT, some materials to be presented at today's meeting were not available for technical reasons. That material will be covered in upcoming meetings.]

- A. Revisions to Previous Block Grant Application
- B. Fiscal Tables (Prerak)
 - 1. SFY ends on 6/30/25 but expense data is not sent to DMHAS until October 2025
 - 2. Closeouts on supplemental funding
- C. Block Grant Fiscal Tables
 - 1. Review/screensharing of URS Table 7a (EBPs, State Hospitals, Other Psych Inpatient care, Residential Care, Ambulatory, Administration, and comments on data)
 - 2. Review/screensharing of URS Table 7b.
 - 3. Review/screensharing of URS Table 7c.
 - 4. Review/screensharing of URS Table 8a.
 - 5. Review/screensharing of URS Table 10. Agencies
- D. SUPTRS tables
 - 1. Review/screensharing of Table 4 (SUD & Tx, Primary Prevention, Tuberculosis services, HIV, Administrative).
- E. URS Data Tables 9, 9a, 11, & 19a (Adult Consumer Survey)
 - 1. The 2025 Adult Consumer Perception of Mental Health Care Survey was distributed 9/5/25 and the deadline was extended to 10/15/25.
 - 2. The survey was directed to over 4,000 randomly selected consumers at 70+ community based, non-acute mental health service agencies.
 - 3. A response rate of >25% is tentatively reported, with very positive results.
 - 4. The applicable URS data tables and detailed information about the survey itself will be shared with the Council at an upcoming meeting.

IV. Issues for Advocacies and Solutions (Heather Simms)

- A. Training for Self-Advocacy (Adam Chrono)
 - 1. Gaining traction to see the resolution
 - 2. Perhaps spearheaded by SHCs.
 - 3. Idea for BHPC to produce a comprehensive Resource Document for Self-Advocacy.

IV. 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 (Susanne Borys, DMHAS).

1. Block Grant

- a. MHBG Revision requests made by SAMSA, under tight timeframes:
 - i. DEI ruling from federal government. All language mentioning DEI, cultural competency, equity was excised from the Block Grant Applications.
- b. SUPTRS: Minimal change requested
- c. New Priority Group: Individuals Seeking Recovery Supports

2. Supplemental funds for SOAR Grant for recovery housing for young adults, \$2.4M. DMHAS is working with county-based SUD staff
3. Additional TA funds for SUPTRS grant and also funds for services.
4. Block Grant Implementation Report due on 12/1/25.

B. Children's Systems of Care (Stacy Reh, DCF CSOC). No update was provided.

C. Division of Developmental Disabilities (Jonathan Sabin)

1. The transition of the Division of Developmental Disabilities' (DDD) Vendor Fiscal/Employer Agent (VF/EA) Self-Directed Services Model to Acumen Fiscal Agent (Acumen) continues. Acumen and DDD are hosting weekly transition update webinars, with Q&A, for individuals and families, support coordinators, supports brokers, and vendors.

- a. For more information on the transition and/or to sign up for a transition webinar please visit :
<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/community/self-directed/acumentransition.shtml>.

2. The DDD Resource Team is pleased to present the 2nd Annual Safety in Your Setting Month in November. This is a time to focus on supervision, independence, and how to keep people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) safe.

- a. For workshop schedule and registration information go to <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/individuals/safety-in-your-setting-month-calendar.pdf> , visit the DDD Health and Safety web page.

- b. For any questions: please contact DDD.ResourceTeam@dhs.nj.gov

3. Q&A

- a. Q: Questions about funding for programs for youth. A: CIACC is a resource. Sometimes issues are not about funding, but rather about lack of staffing.

D. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) (Tatyana Brown):

1. We're excited to share that reimbursement rates for behavioral health services have increased! As part of our ongoing mission to build a robust network of high-quality providers, we are actively recruiting professionals to deliver evaluations and mental health restoration services to our consumers.
2. 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.
3. Please have any interested parties contact me for additional information: dvrsmentalhealth@dol.nj.gov

E. Department of Education (Maurice Ingram): No updates

F. Division of Aging (Jennifer Rutberg):

1. It's Medicare Open Enrollment time. It's very important to have ALL Medicare beneficiaries (age 65+ or on Social Security Disability over 18 months) do their Open Enrollment.
2. NJ has trained, free, unbiased counselors in every county:
 - Atlantic County: (888) 426-9243 or 609-645-7700
 - Bergen County: (201) 336-7413
 - Burlington and Camden Counties: (856) 456-1121 x 146
 - Cape May County: (609) 886-2784.
 - Cumberland County: (856) 453-2220
 - Essex County: (973) 637-1717.
 - Gloucester County: (856) 468-1742
 - Hudson County: (201) 369-4313 x4259.
 - Hunterdon County: (908) 788-1361
 - Mercer County: (609) 273-0588.
 - Middlesex County: (732) 777-1940 ext. 1109
 - Monmouth County: (732) 728-1331.
 - Morris County: (973) 784-4900 x 2901.
 - Ocean County: (800) 668-4899.
 - Passaic County: (973) 569-4060.
 - Salem County: (856) 339-8622.
 - Somerset County: 908-704-6319.
 - Sussex County: (973) 579-0555 x 1223.
 - Union County: (908) 273-6999.

- Warren County: (908) 475-6591
- 3. Annual Enrollment for People with Medicare, from October 15 to December 7 you can:
 - a. Join or switch a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan
 - b. Join or switch a Medicare Advantage Plan
- 4. Time to shop & compare health and drug plan choices, Is your current plan still best one for you (best costs and coverage):
 - a. Choose the plan that fits your needs
 - b. Coverage begins on January 1, 2026
 - c. You'll have membership card/materials in hand
- 5. NOTE: You are locked into your Part D plan for all of 2026 once Open Enrollment Period ends. (some exceptions)
- G. Youth Justice Commission, NJ Dept. of Law & Public Safety: (Francis Walker)
 - 1. Tentatively there are three new secure campus facilities (45 residents each) that are expected to be created (to replace Jamesburg Facilities)
 - 2. Hazelton SUD Treatment program to be created
 - a. Two pilot programs
- H. Department of Corrections (Christina Nicodemus). No updates
- I. NJ Div. of Medical Assistance and Health Services (NJ Family Care/State Medicaid) (Irina Stuchinsky).
 - 1. Aetna has ended their Phase 1 transition period on Nov 1, 2025 and the notification letters were sent to the members. Other health plans/MCOs will extend transition period policies until further notice.
 - 2. Please see this Phase 1 transition period member guidance that is also available on the BHI Stakeholder website at Department of Human Services | Behavioral Health Integration Member Resources.
 - 3. Direct any questions related to BH Integration to: dmahs.behavioralhealth@dhs.nj.gov or call 609 281-8028.
- J. Department of Health: (Susan Loughery):
 - 1. Academic Partnerships at State Psychiatric Hospitals - The State Psychiatric Hospitals continue to expand our academic affiliations. Under our new affiliation with Rowan University SOM, hospital medical leaders are developing curriculum for a new women's integrated health track for patients at the State Psychiatric Hospitals.
 - 2. The hospitals have also established a Program Letter of Agreement with the Forensic Psychiatry Fellowship Program at HMH Ocean University

Medical Center and we look forward to operationalizing our newly expanded Academic Affiliation Agreement with Rutgers University.

- K. NJAMHAA (Mary Abrams)
 - 1. Current conference
 - 2. Priorities being set
- L. Division of Family Development (Jennifer Gietka, not present)
- M. Supported Housing Association (Kate Kelly, not present):
- N. NJ County Mental Health Administrators Association (Elisabeth Marchese). No update provided.
- O. NJ Hospital Association (Deena Tampi, not present). No update provided.
- P. NJ Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJ HMFA), (Donna Spencer). No update provided.

VI. Open Public Comment and Announcements:

- A. Public Comment
 - 1. Question about federal requirement to remove all language regarding DEI and special “at risk” populations. Updated language should be in programs receiving federal funds.
 - 2. Contacting NJ State Medicaid
https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmahs/info/resources/macc/MACC_Directory.pdf
- B. Announcements:
 - 1. NAMI NJ GALA Thursday Nov 20, Westin Princeton 6:00pm.
 - a. Nov 20th Gala in Princeton
 - b. Policy advocacy project: Letter Writing Campaign for 988 funding
 - c. NAMINJ.ORG
 - 2. Supportive Housing Association of NJ will be opening registration for our Nov. 14th Conference in the next few weeks. More details available here: <https://www.shanj.org/conference-2025/>
 - 3. Supported Housing Association (NJ SHA) Conference, 11/14/25
<https://www.shanj.org/conference-2025/>

V. Adjournment: Heather Simms: Time: 11:58: am.

- A. Next meeting 12/10/2025 10:00 am –noon.
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Or call in (audio only)
[+1 609-300-7196](tel:+16093007196), PIN# 306216820#
- B. Future Agenda Items/Additional Items for Meetings in 2025
 - 1. SUPTRS Block Grant & Synar Report
 - 2. Quality Improvement Plan (QIP): (Connie Greene)

3. NJ DoE Threat Assessment Protocols
4. Overview of CSS (Harry Reyes, DMHAS)
5. Pretrial Services in Camden County
6. JJC Discussion (Filomena DiNuzzo)
7. DVR (Tatyana Brown)
8. Presentation on SUD prevention efforts at County Jails?
9. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) (Suzanne B.)
10. AIR, Youth Suicide Prevention (kurt@air.ngo)
11. SUD and the JJC (Francis Walker, JJC)
12. Experiences of Consumers in SUD Crisis