

**Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)**

**Monday, October 20, 2014**

**Alabama Industrial Development Training Center**

The AIACC met on Monday, October 20, 2014, at the Alabama Industrial Development Training Center. The meeting was called to order by Chair, Cam Ward. Also in attendance were Council members: Fred Biasini, Brooke Bowles, Greg Carlson, Lucian Cronkite, Sally Davis, Doris Hill, Myra Jones, Mitchell Lord, Whitney Meade, Sarah Ryan, and Karen Willis. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Russell Green on behalf of Stephanie Azar, Lisa Highfield on behalf of Thomas Bice, Kim Hill on behalf of Cary Boswell, Erin Wofford on behalf of Nancy Buckner, Bama Folsom Hager on behalf of Melanie Jones, Christy Atkinson on behalf of John Mascia, Hanes Swingle on behalf of Myriam Peralta, Courtney Tarver on behalf of Jim Reddoch, and Dawn Ellis on behalf of Don Williamson.

Chairman Ward asked for the new members of the council to introduce themselves. New members include Karen Willis, Adult Representative; Sally Davis, Parent Representative; Whitney Meade, Service Provider Representative; Lucian Cronkite, Health Insurance Representative; and Brooke Bowles, Service Provider Representative.

Minutes from the July 14, 2014 meeting were approved and adopted.

Chairperson Ward's comments: In relation to budget or legislation issues that affect the Council, the last three budget cycles have seen an increase in the line item for Autism. This brings us closer to the goal of creating Regional Centers. The driver's license designation will continue to be pursued, to provide persons with ASD a voluntary designation to be indicated on their driver's license to identify them as having Autism.

State Coordinator's Comments: Anna pointed out that the January 2015 meeting will be held on a Tuesday, rather than the usual Monday, due to scheduling conflicts for the meeting space. In the past, Anna has served as the Learn the Signs Act Early Ambassador, but that role is now being taken on by Tish MacInnis at the Alabama Partnership for Children. Additionally, Anna noted the passing of Mike Martin, a great Autism Advocate and parent with a long history of serving the Autism community, who will be greatly missed.

Membership Committee Announcements and updates were presented by Kim Hill who took nominations for the Co-Chair of the Autism Council, as well as a position on the Executive Committee. A vote was taken and resulted in Greg Carlson's election as the new Co-chair of the AIACC and Brooke Bowles' election as the newest member of the Executive Committee.

Anna presented the Strategic Plan Process and Updates. The new AIACC Structure will allow committees to align with the strategic plan. Committees will develop an action plan for accomplishing the identified activities. They will report to the AIACC at each quarterly meeting on progress and barriers. These reports will also be posted online and will be used as contributions to the *AIACC Annual Report*. Each committee is required to have a parent, or an individual with ASD included in its membership. Attendees of this meeting were encouraged to sign up for the various committees. Chairs are required to be members of the council, but other membership positions are open to the public. The new Committees are 1) Accountability chaired by Whitney Meade; 2) Public Awareness chaired by Melanie Jones; 3) Funding and Finance chaired by Greg Carlson; 4) Accessibility chaired by Brooke Bowles, and 5) Regional Networks chaired by Fred Biasini.

The Accountability Committee/Goal will promote evidence-based, high quality, cost effective models and best practices that provide supports to persons with ASD and their families.

The Public Awareness Committee/Goal will raise public awareness of issues and needs affecting persons with SAD and their families.

The Funding and Finance Committee/Goal will identify and promote opportunities for diversified public and private partnerships that expand needed funding. The draft of the Strategic Plan in this section included advocacy for Medicaid Expansion to put individuals in the Medicaid overage pool based on disability rather than income. However, since this is not part of the governor's current plans, it was removed from the final Strategic Plan. Chairperson Ward stated that people are split on the issue as it is a financial issue. He further explained that accepting Medicaid Expansion could eventually put a burden on the budget, in that with more people eligible for Medicaid benefits, this is a greater weight on the General Fund budget. Additional property or sales taxes are no help, as those funds go solely toward Education. While tobacco taxes do fund Medicaid and prisons, those revenues are declining as the taxes have the desired effect, and fewer people are smoking. There has been a discussion of taxing e-cigarettes as an

additional revenue, along with the potential for internet sales tax, but, as that revenue would be earmarked for the General Fund, that it is a big unknown.

In response to audience member Karen Rossi's question of regarding how Alabama could use strategies that Kentucky has used to cover Medicaid expansion costs, Chairperson Ward explained that in our state, budget structure is the problem. As additional jobs are created in the medical profession as a result of Medicaid Expansion, and there is increased revenue in income, corporate and sales tax, those funds are earmarked for Education and would not be used to cover the cost of the expansion. Ms. Rossi raised the idea of re-structuring the tax code. Per Senator Ward, this would bring its own complications in that it would require a Constitutional Amendment and would probably not be met with acceptance on the public's part as it would be perceived as taking dollars from schools to give to prisons and welfare programs. She further asked why not to have an autism specific waiver. Currently the only waivers available are for those who are severely disabled. There are no waivers for high functioning persons with special needs. There has been some discussion of creating an ASD-specific Medicaid waiver, and Mr. Ward asked for input from Russell Green with Medicaid.

Mr. Green explained that EPSDT authority is intended to provide all the services children need, including medical, dental, communication, and vision. Medicaid is currently in the process of developing a briefing for Dr. Williamson, as well as Dr. Azar, to discuss what avenue should be taken to deal with ASD. Alabama is paying close attention to what is being done in other states and has looked at the state plan to make sure the language is broad enough to provide whatever services are needed to children 21 years of age and under. What they found was the language is very broad and is written in accordance with federal law. The real issue for providing services related to ASD is going to be funding. Medicaid has been consulting with the Department of Mental Health on the issue and realizes funding will have to be appropriated from the legislature as Medicaid will not be able to cover it. There have been discussions and reviews on waivers specifically for ASD. That would be an avenue to pursue so allocated funds would be set aside for the ASD population. Infrastructure will need to include the Department of Mental Health, Medicaid and Education. The question becomes then, how to deliver services, as some will be home-based some will be in schools or health centers. But a waiver is a viable option.

Ms. Rossi makes the point that the Department of Education should be providing services to school-aged children, which would take some of the burden from Medicaid. However, this does not address the needs of adults, who will continue to need services beyond school age.

Ms. McConnell points out that many of the issues that have been raised are part of the strategic plan goals and activities.

Mr. Tarver, on behalf of the Department of Mental Health adds that the public most likely will not support a tax increase. We have to make the general public aware that this is a real need. His department is currently working on several issues, employment being one of them. They are exploring how to better utilize existing dollars to maximize services to individuals.

Mr. Carlson states that the Disability Leadership Coalition has been meeting with the Regional Care Organizations, many of which are headed up by hospitals which can absorb the risk. They have discussed the option of the 10% match being covered someone else. Hospitals are currently working on proposals to the Governor to that effect. Chairperson Ward shares that hospitals have discussed a voluntary tax before. Under this model, a Medical Provider will agree to pay a certain amount of taxes or revenue to cover the expansion. He believes this is a real possibility and that eventually a way will be found to fund Medicaid Expansion.

Lisa Highfield added information on how Special Education funding has not increased to meet the needs of the increases in enrollment. This does not allow for teachers to be dedicated to the population of students with Autism, but they are responsible for students with a variety of Special Education needs. Senator Ward further explained that though the Education Budget seems to be so much greater than the General Fund budget, it is actually lower than it has been in previous sessions.

In further discussion of the strategic plan, Anna discussed the highlights of the sections of Funding and Finance which include focusing on the various sources of insurance, appropriate coverage levels, diagnostic evaluations, waivers and supports, state spending and support, and the support funding for Regional Autism Networks.

The Accessibility Committee/Goal will focus on advocacy for increased choice among, and access to, quality services and supports for people with ASD and their families within ASD community-based systems of care.

Lastly, the Regional Networks Committee/Goal will develop and coordinate necessary resources that allow for the creation of Regional Autism networks by advocating for, promoting, and encouraging the establishment of four to six Regional Autism Networks in accordance with Act 2009-592, as well as support an increase in the number of qualified and competent ASD trained professionals, personnel, and providers. The Committee will be meeting over the next few months to write the Request for Proposal in preparation for funding availability.

The Strategic Plan was voted on and adopted. The approved Strategic Plan will be available online at [http://autism.alabama.gov/Documents/AIACC\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://autism.alabama.gov/Documents/AIACC_Strategic_Plan.pdf).

#### Member Updates and Announcements:

Courtney Tarver shared that this past March the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) instituted a new rule for Health and Community Based Services which defines more clearly what the Federal government will pay for, and in what type of setting, for people who are recipients of community based services. This calls for changes in how DMH does business. There has been great support and input from stakeholders. In addition, the ID waiver is up for renewal. Renewal has been delayed, but extended while the department works through the process. Part of this process is public awareness and Mr. Tarver encourages everyone to visit the DMH website to keep up with the information that is being shared.

Greg Carlson stated the Disability Leadership Coalition will be meeting on November 5<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. They are looking for persons, who are interested in Medicaid Reform, to serve as appointees to the Citizens Advisory Councils. He invites any interested parties to attend the meeting.

Bama Hager gave an update from the Autism Society. They have two large conferences coming up: Making a Difference Conference in Cullman on October 24<sup>th</sup> and Unlocking the Mystery Conference in Gardendale on October 28<sup>th</sup>. Also, the ACDD grant to the Autism Society has allowed Project Lifesaver to expand in Alabama from 47 to 59 counties. They are working to set up the remaining counties. In addition, Ms. Hager wanted to make sure everyone knows ASA supports 30 network support groups in 30 counties in the state. Those counties each have local support groups for families. The leaders are listed on the ASA website as Network Support Groups.

Lisa Highfield with the Department of Education gave an update on the Alabama Autism Initiative. The Autism Team, who also have other responsibilities, have been dedicating as much time as possible to Autism. In January, with support of Dr. Bice and Crystal Richardson, they formed the initiative. They have a leadership member from every school system in the state. They provide services through contracts for LEAs, and diagnostic evaluations at no cost to school district. They also provide training for teachers in the system. They have received great feedback and interest from universities. They are continuing to work with the goal of building capacity and partnering with other agencies. A list of resources available to schools through the Alabama Autism Initiative are available at <http://autism.alabama.gov/Documents/Articles/AlabamaAutismInitiativeMemoFY14-2028.pdf>.

Gail Piggot of the Alabama Partnership for Children presented information regarding Project Launch (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health). The purpose of Project LAUNCH is to promote the wellness of young children from birth to eight years by addressing the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of their development. They will build on the state Help Me Grow and Strengthening Families frameworks and support the development of mental health and behavioral consultations for young children in a variety of settings. Jane Duer of the Department of Mental Health will be the Project Director.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Next meeting: **Tuesday**, January 27, 2015.

Recording Secretary

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C. S. Weldon