

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

**Monday, October 18, 2021**

**Zoom**

The AIACC met on Monday, October 18, 2021, via Zoom (due to COVID-19 meeting capacity restrictions). The meeting was called to order by Dr. Erich Grommet. Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Robert Caldwell, Tametria Conner, Megan Everett, Dr. Erich Grommet, Dr. Heather Jones, Dr. Sarah O'Kelley, Dr. Justin Schwartz, and Chris Stewart. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Wanda Williams for Stephanie Azar, Laurie Eldridge-Auffant for Dr. Scott Harris, Elisabeth Newell for State Superintendent Eric Mackey, Wendi Glass for John Mascia, and Holli Cawthorne for Darryle Powell. Also in attendance was Anna McConnell, State Autism Coordinator.

The minutes from July 2021 were unanimously approved.

Lead Agency Comments and State Coordinator Announcements:

Ms. McConnell opened with greeting the forum. Ms. McConnell noted that a new waiver program for transitioning to the community is expected to be approved by CMS at the end of the year. It is her understanding that the individuals would start this program, rather than the current ID or living at home program. There is other insightful information posted to the ADAP website and the forum is encouraged to review the available information there.

Senator April Weaver is joining the Council. Also, there's a lot of exciting news/reports on activities from sister organizations and the subcommittee partnerships. The Council was encouraged to watch for all upcoming information regarding the subcommittees. As always, if you have any questions or needs please feel free to reach out to Ms. McConnell.

New Business:

0-5 Subcommittee:

Dr. Sarah O'Kelley presented a structure update on behalf of her committee. The groups primary focus has been on collaborations with Early Intervention. The committee's goal is to create a simple multidisciplinary team of professionals and caregivers from the state to develop the best practice guidelines for children from birth to 5 years with Autism or at risk for Autism. The second task is to clarify the process for determining eligibility for ASD interventions across systems impacting children from birth to 5 years of age.

Dr. O'Kelley's presentation included an overview of the Alabama Part C System-Advancing Autism Initiative.

- Early Autism Workgroup started meeting in 2018 with the goals of identifying the best practices for screening and intervention with Part C and aligning goals and strategies of Part C and AIACC.
- The screening pilot was launched May 5, 2021.

E.I. Screening Team	
Mary Beth Vick of Alabama Early Intervention System	Wendy Pittard District Early Intervention Coordinator
Kelly Goff, MS, BCBA, LBA Autism Services: Regional Coordinator, Region 1 ADMH	Leslie Hackney, B.S. Spec. ED-IECE District Early Intervention Coordinator
Angela B. Barber, Ph.D., CCC-SLP Associate Professor The University of Alabama	Kimberly R. Tomeny, Ph. D. Clinical Assistant Professor Program Director, EI@UA
Sarah O'Kelley, Ph. D Clinical Associate Professor UAB	

The E.I. Screening team meets every other week to discuss the current project; the pilot has been running since May across four programs that involves staff from AIDB Mobile, Village E.I., Tri-County, and Project Wiggles and Giggles. The committee's goals for screening in Alabama Systems is to maximize provider awareness and support their concerns based on their knowledge of early red flags, use a screener to navigate caregiver and provider concerns, begin conversations about ASD and provide objective measures to address these concerns, simultaneous referral for ASD specific and clinical evaluation to confirm diagnosis of ASD, and routine screening for ASD in addition to prompted concerns regarding ASD. Dr. O' Kelley also noted the team's goals for screening in Alabama systems is to maximize provider awareness and support, use a screener to navigate caregiver and provider concerns, to provide simultaneous referrals for ASD specific and clinical evaluations, and conduct routine screening for ASD in addition to prompted concerns regarding ASD.

Dr. O'Kelley also presented a pilot flowchart for newly referred children. The flowchart serves a guide to ensure that children qualifying for services that are within Early Intervention and that those services are appropriate to the child's specific needs. The chart also recognizes that there

may be some children who may likely have Autism but may not qualify based on Early Intervention eligibility qualifications. Overall, the committee's goal with the pilot flowchart is to not only identify the children who are already qualifying for E.I. based on their areas of need but to also identify children who are at a high risk of Autism.

Dr. O' Kelley noted that children who have been identified as being high risk are referred to a number of partner clinics across the state. These clinics, which already perform Autism specific evaluations, have agreed to set priority referrals for those children. Those clinics and resources are:

<b>Priority Referrals</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Glenwood, Inc.	RAN
Mitchell's Place	ADMH Autism Services
UAB Civitan-Sparks Clinics & Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics	Infant Early Childhood Mental Health
UA Autism Spectrum Disorders Research Clinic	UA Autism Clinic

Dr. O'Kelley also noted that since May 2021, 142 children have been screened with 79 being identified, and 54 consenting to ASD evaluations. 81% of the 142 have been evaluated and 13 out of 16 have received a diagnosis of ASD. However, Dr. O' Kelley did state that there are a few barriers regarding providers not giving referrals or families not being ready for the assessment along with access, insurance, and intake.

The committees' next steps will be continuing a data driven, structured approach. Expanding to children already in the system and continue to work along with IECMH and identify scores/cutoffs with the Early Intervention population that guide referrals along with monitoring CRS clinics to see high likelihood/priority referrals. The committee also plans to work along with AIACC Diagnostics and Health workgroup, collaborate with Part B for transition and eligibility, and expand statewide.

The 0-5 Workgroup have meetings scheduled for the upcoming month and they will continue with plans for the 3-5 age group.

Dr. Grommet had a question about identifying the children in high-risk environments, but they did not trigger an ASD evaluation. He noted that the children with a lack of restricted repetitive behavior may not register with the M-CHAT's, but still may have some developmental delays that would require other type of evaluations. Dr. O'Kelley noted that there may be some known genetic disorders or medical conditions, etc., but they have non-autism developmental delays. Dr. Tomeny gave an overview on the Statewide ASD Initiative (Intervention). She noted that Dr. Angie Barber leads this project in partnership with Alabama's Early Intervention System. The

team's goal is to build the capacity with the existing Part C system. An additional goal for the team is to create a sustainable system of care for young children with confirmed or suspected ASD and their families. Five ASD-Specific Practices were created and adopted by Alabama's Early Intervention System. The 5 practices are:

1. Caregiver-implemented intervention
2. Following the child's lead
3. Naturalistic teaching
4. Modeling
5. Natural reinforcement

Dr. Tomeny also presented the teams timeline and achievements. They begin in 2019 with Dr. Tomeny and Dr. Barber organizing workshops in 7 districts where 217 providers received training on Autism strategies based around caregiver coaching. In the same year a conference was held with Dr. Amy Weatherby of Florida State University. In 2020, the team endured minor setbacks from COVID, but they were still able to complete remote training. In 2021, training has continued with the 5 ASD coaches. Group training also began with 8 new ASD coaches, and in December a conference will be held with Dr. Melanie Pellecchia of the University of Pennsylvania on community-based Early Intervention specific to Autism. In 2022, the team is in the process of finalizing the next steps to support providers statewide.

Dr. Grommet had a question regarding the amount of training the caregiver receives once their child has been found eligible. It was noted that each family along with the program creates an individualized family service plan.

#### 6-13 Subcommittee:

Dr. Heather Jones noted the committee has met since the last meeting. The team is continuing in their efforts to aid the children ages 6 to 13 entering the school system. The committee is open and welcoming to anyone who would be interested in joining. Dr. Jones also noted the DMH services have picked up in Region 5, because of that the team's focus has been working on supporting school-based services, families, and the school system. The committee has also provided resources to families who require assistance outside of the school setting. In 2022 the committee will work along with ALSDE to hopefully present data on the typed of services received through the school system.

#### 14-20 Subcommittee:

Dr. Erich Grommet requested that resources related to Autism and transition from children to adult services be forwarded to him. Dr. Grommet noted that feedback regarding the site and

resources can be sent to him via email at [egrommet@troy.edu](mailto:egrommet@troy.edu). Also, Dr. Grommet noted that the committee will focus its attention to related activities in their strategic plan. That is, to identify gaps and transition resources available in Alabama with the goals of filling those gaps. Another objective is to identify scholarships to costs associated with transition related services. The committee will continue to meet monthly, Dr. Grommet also encouraged anyone interested in working with the 14-20 subcommittee to please reach out to him.

#### 21+ Subcommittee:

Dr. Sarah Ryan stated that the committee has met twice since the last council meeting, and then monthly on the fourth Wednesday of the month. Dr. Ryan noted that the committee currently has two projects in motion. As of right now the team is compiling information from other states to better support adults with Autism here in Alabama, specifically what's being funded at the state level and what type of justification is provided for the state's budgets. The second project, stemming from the STEP Program, is transition program for medical and some developmental needs at Children's Alabama. The goal is to be able to help support the medical providers of our students, adolescents, and adults who are transitioning into the next phase of care. Dr. Ryan extended an open invitation to anyone wishing to join the 21+ subcommittee.

#### Diagnostics and Health:

Dr. Justin Schwartz noted that his subcommittee has continued to meet monthly. The team is currently working from a strategic plan and prioritizing how to best support providers from a diagnostics and health standpoint. The committee has recently discussed mechanisms for identifying children who might have Autism, especially younger age groups across the state. Dr. Schwartz noted that his team is particularly looking to help aide pediatricians in this initiative. The teams hope is to have a more reliable system to encourage identification and ultimately diagnose Autism in younger groups. Dr. Schwartz also reiterated the importance of pushing appropriate referrals to early intervention across the primary care sphere. One of the committee members, Dr. Rose James, who is a primary care physician in the UAB Primary Care Clinic has been doing diagnostic assessments using data from five checklist for those who have obvious symptoms. Dr. James' initiative has done well, however, there are some workflow issues. The committee has also had discussions on how to broaden health care needs both physical and mental for older children with Autism across the lifespan. Dr. Schwartz noted his concern about the capacity of the system to meet the needs in this regard. Dr. Schwartz also mentioned that a physician from Mobile and subcommittee member noted that there is a lack of psychiatrists in this area. Dr. Schwartz noted that he and other physicians in Developmental Behavioral

Pediatrics were being shifted to focus more on younger children. The teams hope is to figure out ways to bridge the gap in care. One future goal is to hopefully have Project Echo Autism back online in January. The committee has made this a focal point and believe that they've secured a coordinator for the project. Dr. Schwartz invited anyone that would like to join in these efforts to join in. Dr. Grommet asked if there was any data regarding barriers that might differentiate non-English-speaking clients from those that do speak English. An example was in terms of speed of the referral process. Dr. Schwartz noted that the committee has discussed issues related to equity of care, he also noted that unfortunately there are some disparities that could be directly related to the language barrier. However, Dr. Schwartz did note that the entire committee should or is already including some components of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) to ensure that our system is accessible to all.

#### Public Awareness:

Melanie Jones noted the that her team did meet and are continuing their work on an Autism friendly website. The committee has received additional help and is moving forward in a positive direction with minor details to work out. The team is continuing work on an infographic for distribution to pediatricians and other service providers. Once a family has a diagnosis this will assist them with what steps to follow for care. Ms. Jones included her email in the chat.

#### Regional Autism Network (RAN):

Amy Mitchell spoke on behalf of the Regional Autism Network staff. Ms. Mitchell noted the loss of two staff members, April Coleman and Ashley McClain who both returned to the classroom. She also noted the loss of Mobile's Family Navigator Dana Handmacher. However, Ms. Mitchell was happy to announce Allison Davis, who is the new director for the Regional Autism Network, University of Alabama and Gwen Brown as the Family Navigator for UAB. She noted that both women are off to wonder starts in their respective regions. Ms. Mitchell also solicited information on anyone interested in the Family Navigator position available in Mobile.

On September 9, 2021 the RAN conducted it's strategic planning meeting via zoom. The day long training was productive, and the committee's focus was working on a data collection system. The system is a collection of information from the consumer/client on what the state needs. The group is making great progress and hopes to have more information to share at the next meeting. The RAN also participated in a suicide prevention training, which was held by the Alabama Suicide Prevention and Resource Coalition. Ms. Mitchell noted the training was extremely informative and resourceful to the RAN's daily initiative, she also encouraged the committee at large to participate in the training.

Ms. Mitchell noted that the RAN also provides public education and professional trainings. UAB has reached over one hundred people this past quarter through community workshops and virtual meetings. They will also begin Lunch and Learn trainings on October 27, 2021. These will be hour long trainings with smaller groups. Ms. Mitchell also spoke on the Spanish resources and noted that Auburn participates with Alabama Hispanic Training and Resource Advocacy Network (HTRAN) and recommend their services to the forum. Ms. Mitchell noted that Auburn provided trainings that included, Medicaid training for families and professionals, First Responders Safety training, Educational Readiness training, and general family training. In all they were able to provide training for over 500 people. The presentations are in English translated to Spanish and in some cases Korean.

All of the RANs have worked over the summer with various regional in-service centers. Ms. Mitchell thanked Elizabeth Newel of the Department of Education. Ms. Newel helped facilitate getting the RAN staff involved with trainings throughout the summer. Auburn and USA trained with Jacksonville State; Troy University trained with Alabama States. The UAB RAN provided training in Bibb County. The RAN was able to conduct training for teachers across the state. The RAN was present at the Mega Conference in Mobile for educators. Ms. Newel is interested in continuing and looks forward to collaborating with the RAN.

In closing Ms. Mitchell addressed the need and concern for adult services. She noted that the Network receives a multitude of calls with various needs, but the common thread is what services are available for adults. Ms. Mitchell thanked several committee members for their continued work and offered her assistance in any capacity needed. Dr. Hill thanked ACDD for their efforts and helping to fund the Hispanic Outreach Support initiative.

#### Funding and Finance Updates:

- Behavior Analyst Licensing Bd. update
- Update on Private/Private Coverage updates for ASD

Ms. McConnell provided a link for the Medicaid provider directory; the ABA provider list can be located there as well. Also, the current Licensure Board list was added to the chat. DMH Autism has seen positive numbers for enrollment and are still needing more providers, if anyone is interested in becoming a DMH Autism provider they are encouraged to reach out to Ms. McConnell and the DMH Autism Services staff. Ms. McConnell also noted that 10% of the clients served through DMH Autism Services are Spanish speaking recipients. DMH Autism Services through other partnered services has been able to effectively provide services and referrals to our Spanish speaking population. Also noted, was the concern for more services for adults. DMH

tracks and logs calls for data collection. This helps to track what resources are being requested and what is needed.

Dr. Hill noted that Ken Atkins forwarded his report to her for the forum. It includes 458 active License Behavior Analysts and 34 active License Assistant Behavior Analysts in Alabama. There are only 39 out of 67 counties that have Behavior Analyst. Jefferson County has 65, Madison has 44, Lee has 36, Mobile has 29, Shelby has 26, Calhoun has 23, Baldwin has 17, Montgomery has 14, Houston has 10, and Coffee has 10.

#### Member Updates:

Holli Cawthorne from Alabama Council on Development of Disabilities, she noted that they do have four RFP's open as result of completing their five-year state plan and the areas that were identified that needed work were, employment education and early intervention, and the informal and formal community supports. If anyone is interested, those positions are listed at [ACDD.org](http://ACDD.org). The council is looking forward to and hoping for a good positive response involving a new HTRAN project. The project involves Alabama tourism, it will train hoteliers on how to become more sensory friendly for their guests and making travel easier. The council is also reinstating the best way to put partners in policy, each include training families on how to become legislative advocates. Ms. Holly noted that the council conducted and orientation on Wednesday and they will kick off November 5<sup>th</sup> in Opelika. The course will be offered on-site and virtually; it's an eight-month course. Twenty families will start the courses with hopes of increasing that number to 25-30 families in the years to come. Lastly there is a project the council has worked on for the last 3 or 4 years in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health. The project is a national model that was originally funded by the administration on intellectual and developmental disabilities; with several states a part of the project it provides tools and ideas on supporting people throughout their lifespan. The region advisory network meets monthly with call in meetings.

There were no General Announcements given.

Mr. Caldwell will be speaking via Zoom; the conference is scheduled in London.

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

Next meeting: Monday, January 24, 2022