

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

**Monday, October 17, 2022**

### **Zoom**

The AIACC met on Monday, October 17, 2022, via Zoom. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Erich Grommet. Also in attendance were Council members: Robert Caldwell, Tametria Conner, Erich Grommet, Heather Jones, Melanie Jones, Sarah O'Kelley, and Justin Schwartz. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Jean Wackerle for Stephanie Azar, Elisabeth Newell for Eric Mackey, Wendi Glass for John Mascia, Yada Horace for Jim Ridling, Kelsey Clements for Chris Stewart. Also in attendance was Anna McConnell, State Autism Coordinator.

Dr. Grommet called the Council to order and welcomed participants.

The minutes from July 2022 were unanimously approved.

Lead Agency Comments and State Coordinator Announcements:

Ms. McConnell noted that those wishing to be on the mailing list may email [anna.mcconnell@mh.alabama.gov](mailto:anna.mcconnell@mh.alabama.gov) or put email address in the chat box. It was also noted that there are frequent questions about the numbers of people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in Alabama. Currently the best option is to apply the prevalence rate of ASD to Alabama's census data. This can be problematic as the prevalence rate has changed over the years and for different cohorts of individuals studied (CDC ADDM studies 8-year-olds and publishes data every 4 years). However, the CDC has recently released the [Autism Data Visualization Tool](#) that compares data from Child Count, National Survey of Children's Health, Medicaid, and the CDC's ADDM Network and is sortable by state or national data. Also of note, the Autism Diagnostic Tool for Healthcare Providers has been shared at several conferences, hopefully increasing access to diagnostics for the Medicaid population.

New Business:

0-5 Subcommittee:

Dr. O'Kelley shared on behalf of the 0-5 Committee as other members were at the EI Conference and presenting on these screening initiatives. The group has continued to work on screening for autism symptoms within the early intervention population. There are four pilot early intervention sites that are routinely administering the MCHAT at entry for kids between 18 and 30 months, as well as during the reevaluation period. These children will be referred to be seen for comprehensive evaluation, to rule in or rule out autism. There are several clinics who are participating for those priority referrals. So far over 300 kids have been screened through those four programs at entry, and 192 of them were identified as being at risk with the MCHAT, One hundred twenty-eight of those had consented to evaluation as of mid-June. Of the 105 who have received an evaluation, 85% of those received a diagnosis of autism. This diagnosis will hopefully help them transition into school-based services with

that diagnosis as well as into community services at relevant and appropriate to autism. EI teams are continuing to work toward referrals to evidence-based practices and interventions.

Dr. Kimberly Tomeny has continued to coach and train 13 autism mentors across the state. They work at various sites within our early intervention system. Learning collaboratives have occurred and over 200 providers and service coordinators throughout the State for these community learning collaboratives. A listserv will be created for participants to receive research and training updates.

Another part of this project includes working with CRS and utilizing their existing infrastructure and evaluation system to incorporate evaluation of autism. CRS is piloting autism diagnostic clinics, only taking EI referrals. There is a plan and hope to expand those clinics around the state. Within the next 6 months or so they hope to launch 2 additional clinics.

There was a question as to how many people are ADOS trained in Alabama. There is not a firm number on this immediately available. However, there is good knowledge of diagnostic clinics around the state.

6-13 Subcommittee:

Dr. Heather Jones noted that the primary focus of the workgroup has been working with the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and how to best support teachers. Elisabeth Newell from ALSDE noted that a survey had been developed and distributed to educators to assess training needs. Responses indicate that a focus needs to be abilities rather than assumptions of inability. For example, just because students can't verbally respond to questions doesn't mean students don't have cognition or can't communicate in other ways. Assessments allow for accommodations, which would allow for more accuracy in students' abilities. The survey will continue to be distributed to gain more information from educators to inform future trainings. Trainings will include theory of mind and executive functioning – a better understanding of needs related to these topics could improve behavior challenges in classrooms. Regional trainings utilizing in-service centers will allow for access to all LEAs. Autism-specific trainings were conducted in conjunction with the RAN and were recorded, allowing for continued access for educators.

14-20 Subcommittee:

Dr. Erich Grommet noted that the website housing transition resources (<http://spectrum.troy.edu/chrysalis/>) continues to be updated. Information about group members will likely also be included to show specific expertise in the membership and to encourage questions/collaboration. The group is also evaluating the resources and planning for sharing them through a conference opportunity, like the transition conference. The Auburn Transition Leadership Institute is no longer in existence, but there is a possibility the conference will continue.

21+ Subcommittee:

Dr. Sarah Ryan noted the 21+ committee is continuing to recruit membership and meetings are held monthly. The group is in the process of getting IRB approval for a provider survey in case of future publishing of data. The group is interested in identifying the big needs that prevent medical providers from being willing to take on adults with autism as patients (financial, insurance issues, training, etc.)? Dr. Ellis and Dr. Hill are newly hired psychologists at UAB Sparks who are also participating in this work.

The group will also be looking at other resources and posting the findings online. The group is looking at using the Yellow Dot model for emergency purposes.

#### Diagnostics and Health:

Dr. Justin Schwartz noted that the subcommittee has focused on insurance issues, including workforce opportunities for assessments like the ADOS. The group has also worked toward finding ways to support primary care providers in the use of Autism Healthcare Provider Diagnostic Tool that walks them through the DSM 5 Checklist. A survey has been developed and recently distributed to ascertain providers' attitudes and current practices related to their understanding of, and ability to identify and diagnose ASD. The group is also in the process of developing a toolkit and series of resources that can be readily available for primary providers to support the available tools. The group will hopefully be doing strategic planning with the Alabama AAP Chapter. Dr. Nola Ernest is the new AAP Alabama Chapter President and one of her main missions is to put together a committee of people across the State, in partnership with the Alabama Department and Mental Health, focused on mental health of children. Dr. Schwartz reached out to Dr. Ernest and requested that AIACC be represented on the committee. The committee continues to work with CRS to provide technical assistance for the clinic currently that exists in Tuscaloosa and is trying to help guide the process of expanding those clinics across the State. This model assists in access geographically as the capacity for CRS to serve autism grows. Regarding the database project, the subcommittee has been working with tech students at UAB to put together a prototype geographically searchable database of service providers across Alabama that can be self-sustaining. There are some barriers to hosting at UAB, so there may be a partnership opportunity for hosting this site. In regard to the Autism Healthcare Provider Diagnostic Tool, Medicaid accepts its use in conferring a diagnosis, but BCBS/New Directions only allows that diagnosis using the tool for 90 days before cognitive and adaptive testing, among others, are required for coverage of interventions.

Dr. Grommet noted that having conversations from other licensing boards beyond the BCBA Licensing Board may be of benefit regarding barriers and access. There are individuals in Alabama who could be providing services, but due to licensing issues, they cannot provide services, even though licensure is recognized in other states and should be accessible in Alabama.

Dr. Schwartz noted that the Society for Development Behavioral Pediatrics. and the DBV Research network are starting an initiative called S. A. F. E. (Securing Access for Everyone). This is a national project that it has been soliciting testimony and information for best practices for supporting individuals with developmental disabilities including autism spectrums. Dr. Schwartz has spoken with Darryl Powell of the ACDD and a few others to discuss what could be applied in Alabama to support individuals with autism or other kind of intellectual developmental disabilities and make sure that access to healthcare is equitable.

#### Regional Autism Network (RAN):

Ms. Allison Davis, Region II RAN Director provided updates for all RAN locations.

Region 1 – UAH RAN is partnering with AIDB to assist individuals with sensory loss. Collaboration with other agencies continues.

Region 2 – UA RAN has seen more requests in the area of early childhood. Access to diagnostic evaluations and requests for social skills groups for youth and adults are common requests.

Region 3 – USA RAN attended MEGA Conference for educators and public education professionals. The USA RAN provided 3 public education events, and provided direct assistance to 105 individuals, a majority of which were new contacts. Almost 30 of those contacts were seeking diagnostic testing.

Region 4 – The AU RAN provided direct assistance to 239 contacts and provided technical assistance to 247 people. Training was provided to 1,300 individuals and 1,700 individuals were reached through public awareness venues. Additional trainings have been added to the YouTube channel for Hispanic outreach trainings. A Korean Community Liaison has allowed for greater outreach as well.

Region 5 – The UAB RAN held their largest community education workshop called Into the Community. A training was provided to the Boy Scouts of America. Disability Awareness Month provided the opportunity to remember that not all disabilities are visible.

Anna McConnell noted that requests for increased funding for the RAN had been ongoing for several years. During the last legislative session, additional funding was appropriated to the Regional Autism Networks. This additional funding will aid in providing outreach and training in more areas around the state – especially rural areas. All RANs will be funded to have Family Navigators and additional funding for community liaisons for greater community involvement.

#### Funding and Finance Updates:

The ALABA Conference was very well attended, with more RBTs attending than in past years. The growth is encouraging as the need for providers continues to be high.

Dr. Schwartz discussed some of the private insurance access concerns already, especially regarding diagnosis requirements.

Medicaid coverage for autism services is available through ADMH Autism Services (Chapter 110) and available for ABA therapy in Chapter 37.

#### Announcements:

Dr. O’Kelley noted the [Alabama Autism Conference](#) will be held in Tuscaloosa. The conference will be held in a hybrid format – both in person and virtually.

Robert Caldwell noted he had been a virtual invited speaker to multiple conferences internationally. He is available as a speaker locally as well.

Tametria Connor noted that DATSMOM is a nonprofit that has partnered with As You Are (which provides virtual diagnostic evaluations) to share their available opportunities.

Jenny Morris noted that the Autism Society of Alabama is going through a name change and will be known as Autism Support of Alabama due to rebranding and legal restrictions with the National Autism Society of America.

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

Next meeting: Monday, January 23, 2023

Recording Secretary:

Anna McConnell