

The Outlook

Alabama Department of Mental Health Newsletter



988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE



Two Years and 99,000 Alabamians: The Impact of 988 and Expansion of Mental Health Care Access

Mental health is a vital component of overall well-being, shaping how we think, feel, and interact with the world. It influences how we manage stress, form relationships, and make important life choices.

Many people will experience mental health-related distress or crises in their lives, with over 50 million adults in the U.S. experiencing a

mental illness. To address this, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline was launched in July 2022. In just two years, the 988 Lifeline has answered more than 10 million texts, calls, and chats nationally, providing support to those in need.

With the implementation of the three-digit Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) integrated 988 into its Alabama Crisis System of Care, making it the first step in an event of a crisis, whether it is emotional distress, mental health, or substance use crises.

By addressing the barriers many people face when seeking mental health help, the Alabama Department of Mental Health has been able to provide resources and life-saving support. With over 99,000 Alabamians having

contacted 988, as of July 31, 2024.

The ADMH continues its expansion of the Alabama Crisis System of Care by developing additional mobile crisis teams, opening more crisis centers across the state, and transitioning to a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model of care that provides care and helps people navigate behavioral health care, physical health care, and social services.

The upcoming Dothan Crisis Center, managed by SpectraCare Health is set to open this fall, and will include a 988 Lifeline call center and mobile crisis team in one building, offering much-needed services to residents experiencing behavioral health or substance use crises.

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Want to be included in the next issue?

Send us your stories, achievements and events!

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334-242-3417



Suicide is a serious issue and is one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. Suicide is a serious issue and is one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. It deeply affects not only individuals but also families and communities. Suicidal thoughts or ideations can impact anyone.

To raise awareness, September has been designated as National Suicide Prevention Month, serving as a reminder that mental health matters and suicide is preventable. Recognizing the warning signs and knowing how to seek help can make a significant difference and save lives.

The Office of Prevention at the Alabama Department of Mental Health has marked Suicide Prevention Month by hosting various events, including a Wall of Remembrance, Sharing Resources, and QPR Training for staff.



RECOVERY *is Real.*

National Recovery Month

Recovery is a process of change that helps people improve their health and wellness, live independently, and reach their full potential. National Recovery Month is observed every September to celebrate the different aspects of recovery. Recovery is not one size fits all. Every person's recovery journey is different.

During Recovery Month, we celebrate and embrace these journeys and unite to promote awareness and provide support. Recovery is possible, and there is hope.



"I'm a person in long term recovery and what that means to me is since March 1st, 2013, I've been able to help others and make a difference in my community. Recovery from substance use disorder and mental health is living a life of purpose which makes all the difference in the world. My past is the one thing that can give someone hope in the darkest of places. Because I got through that struggle, they can get through that struggle as well. I wasn't a bad person trying to get good; I was a sick person trying to get well. Today I have the privilege of being a voice for others and if I can help one person, I've done my job."

**- Mark Aaron Litvine CRSS,
CPS Substance Use Peer
Coordinator for the Alabama
Department of Mental Health**



The Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council collaborates with Community College Students on Podcast Series

As part of its ongoing effort to raise public awareness, the Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council recently partnered with Coastal Alabama Community College (CACC) to [produce a four-episode podcast series focusing on opioid abuse](#).

Brandon Folks, a senior program manager with ADMH who is a member of the council's Community Engagement and Outreach Committee, said the idea for the podcast emerged from one of his committee's brainstorming sessions.

"We developed a resource guide in year one, so we had to move on to additional goals and objectives," he said. "We thought, 'How about we have a couple of different topics that we can interview some subject matter experts for and then develop a podcast and disseminate it statewide?'"

Using state grant funds received by the AltaPointe Health Prevention Office in Fairhope, the committee collaborated with a peer leaders group at CACC to develop an outline for four episodes for the "What If You Knew" podcast, which explores mental health, wellness and substance use topics and offers its listeners helpful tips on how to access resources.

"We knew the platform was already set up, so we just needed the students to interview the various experts," Folks said. "I gave them a list of topics, and they chose from among those and then arranged the interviews."

The first two episodes – Laced and Untraced Part 1 and Part 2 – featured Mike Reese of Operation Save Teens and Stephanie Hollinghead and Sherri Swartz with the Fairhope Police Department. Episodes 3 and 4 – Opioids Part 1 and Part 2 – highlight interviews with Jacy Werner of the Benjamin Thomas Werner Foundation and the Rev. Eugene Jacobs, Faith-Based Support Specialist ambassador for the Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP).

With the four episodes complete, Folks said his committee is turning its attention to its next goal: an hour-long virtual townhall in the first half of fiscal year 2026. The event is in its planning stages, with committee members putting together a needs assessment survey to determine what people are looking for or want to hear.

"The plan is to have three or four panelists who'll speak for a few minutes and then follow that with a Q&A session," he said. "The panelists will be determined by the survey results, but we want to include a person who can give a lived experience perspective."

To listen to the four opioid-focused episodes of "What If You Knew," visit <https://rss.com/podcasts/proudtobefreebaldwin/>.



NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH

RECOVERY. HOPE. HEALING.

NASADAD

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE ALCOHOL AND DRUG AGENCY DIRECTORS

NASADAD Staff and our Members wear purple to recognize September 2024 as National Recovery Month.



NASADAD is pleased to share the 2024 NASADAD Recovery Month Collage! National Recovery Month is an annual observance held each September to celebrate people in recovery from substance use disorder (SUD) and raise awareness for critical recovery support services. National Recovery Month has adopted a permanent theme of “Every person. Every family. Every Community.” Through this theme, Recovery Month seeks to elevate recovery practices and the effectiveness of SUD services to educate the public, stakeholders, and communities that recovery from SUD is possible for everyone.

NASADAD members are the lead agency in each State or jurisdiction responsible for managing federal funds dedicated to addressing substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery. This month, our members wear purple to celebrate recovery and promote awareness of SUD issues.

Daily School Attendance and Classroom Engagement Remain Top Priorities for 2024-2025 Academic Year

By: Edward Crenshaw

National research indicates students who are chronically absent, in any year between eighth and 12th grade, are over 7 times more likely to drop out, compared to those with better daily attendance.

Our state and local communities are working together to keep Alabama's school attendance moving in the right direction. Chronic absences can often reflect the real-world challenges some students and families are facing.

Communicating the importance of every child showing up for school is key. Any barriers in transportation, student health care access, or family home stability must be addressed.

September has officially been designated as School Attendance Awareness Month 2024.

Finding innovative and effective ways to address learning losses must also

remain a top priority. Parents must have their children engaged and ready to learn each day. Educators statewide are reenergized as schools across our state have begun the new school year.

This national campaign urges schools, localities, and states to promote the value of good school attendance. Chronic absenteeism -18 days or more a year (excused and unexcused) places students at greater academic risk. Schools have the potential to support students' growth by helping them develop great connections to teachers, peers, and their local community.



State Combined Campaign: A Chance to Make a Difference

Giving has several advantages, according to research, for both the giver and the recipient. These advantages include happier lives, less stress, and stronger social connections. The State Combined Campaign provides every state employee with a fantastic opportunity to donate to a variety of organizations through convenient options.

Donations made through the SCC enable organizations to continue their critical work of helping individuals and providing comprehensive care. To donate or learn more, please contact the Office of Public Information at public.dmh@mh.alabama.gov.



FBSS graduates share their thoughts on the importance of training



The Faith-Based Support Specialist (FBSS) program, created and managed by the Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) and certified by ADMH, is an interfaith program providing senior-level faith leaders with the knowledge, tools and resources to effectively assist individuals with substance use disorders.

Topics for the two-day training include What is Prevention, Emerging Trends in Substance Misuse, Effective Communication and Listening Skills, Cultural Competence, and Ethics.

So far in 2024, the program has certified 65 faith leaders – bringing its total to 335 since it first began offering its seminars in March 2022.

Three FBSS graduates offer their thoughts on the training's impact:



First and foremost I'd like to thank Mr. Seyram Selase, the executive director of ASAP, for inviting us to become Faith-Based Support Specialists by attending and participating in the training offered by and through ASAP.

As pastors of a local church for over 40 years, we well understand the importance of the sacred and the secular communities joining hands to minister to an age-old problem that is only becoming worse. Because of ASAP, we're much more "AWARE" of a problem that has destroyed, and continues to destroy, thousands of lives on a daily basis.

AWARENESS is the first step toward dealing with any problem, and because of the training we've received via ASAP, we're much more cognizant of the myriad of ways that drugs have infiltrated our society. We'd rather have the training and not need it than need it and not have it.

**- Jackie and Bob McClain,
Living by Faith Ministry, Oxford, Alabama**

As a person in long-term recovery who works in the addiction recovery field and is a faith leader, I was deeply impacted by the FBSS conference.

The networking with other attendees, variety of speakers and content of their presentations far exceeded my expectations. From learning new techniques in interview communication to a true "prison to the palace" success in recovery, we saw that beyond hope in recovery, there is also HOPE.

**- Christie McLendon, CRC,
Community Outreach, Self Recovery LLC,
Lanett, Alabama**



THE ADVOCATOR

Vol 3, Issue 1

NILES VALENTINE HIMSELF

Introducing Niles Valentine, New Director of Self-Advocacy

Niles Valentine, a passionate advocate and self-advocate for disability rights, has been appointed as the new Director of Self-Advocacy for the Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Niles, 28, was diagnosed with autism at 13 and has since been committed to navigating and improving a world not built for people like him.

Niles's journey has been shaped by two key concepts: interdependence and customized employment. He believes in fostering communities where everyone's contributions are valued and tailoring job responsibilities to individual strengths. Niles sees autism not as a limitation, but as a different way of approaching things, often leading to innovation and progress.

In his new role, Niles is excited to launch an Advisory Council comprising self-advocates and representatives from disability organizations. The council will focus on those served by the Alabama Department of Mental Health's Division of Developmental Disabilities, working to identify and address community needs.

The council's priorities include promoting self-advocacy skills, increasing access to customized employment, fostering interdependence, and advocating for policies that support full inclusion.



Bringing it Back: The Return of the Advocate

[The Advocate](https://mh.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/The-Advocator-Sep2024.pdf) is a quarterly newsletter published by the Office of Self-Advocacy Services. This new issue marks the return of the newsletter after a brief break, returning with the same insight and updates. Read more at <https://mh.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/The-Advocator-Sep2024.pdf>.

To new beginnings: Alabama CIT News releases first issue

[Alabama CIT News](#) is a new endeavor designed to deliver essential updates, resources, and valuable information to the community concerning the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program. This program involves a cooperative approach among law enforcement, mental health experts, individuals with mental health conditions, and advocates for family members.

Its main goal is to ensure that individuals suffering from severe mental illnesses receive the appropriate medical care rather than becoming entangled in the criminal justice system due to behaviors associated with their conditions. The newsletter acts as a platform to raise awareness and provide backing for CIT in Alabama. [Click here to read the first newsletter.](#)



ADMH staff participated in a learning collaborative at SAMHSA in Maryland in August.

Did You Know? Help is Available Directly to State Employees

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free confidential counseling services to state employees and their dependents. EAP is a short-term counseling and referral service designed to help employees become more effective and efficient in their jobs by providing professional assistance.

Whether you're facing personal, family, or work-related challenges, the EAP offers professional support to help manage stress, improving well-being, and navigating difficult situations.



National Family Caregivers Month Honors Sacrifices of those Caring for Loved Ones

This November, organizations nationwide will commemorate National Family Caregivers Month (NFCM).

The annual observance is intended to raise public awareness of the societal contributions of caregivers and to honor and recognize them for the selfless care and support they provide to loved ones who are ill, elderly or have disabilities.

Established in 1997 through a proclamation by then-President Bill Clinton, NFCM has since grown into a national campaign that provides valuable resources to caregivers and promotes caregiver-focused policies. Nationally, the observance is spearheaded by the Caregiver Action Network (CAN), a nonprofit organization providing free education, peer support and resources to family caregivers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines caregivers as “family members or friends who typically provide unpaid, long-term, community-based care and assistance to older adults and people with chronic health conditions or disabilities.” There are some 53 million family caregivers in the U.S., according to the CDC, with one-third of those providing at least 20 hours of care weekly.



Integrea Community Health System Celebrates Grand Opening

Integrea Community Mental Health System, formerly East Alabama Mental Health Center, celebrated its grand opening on August 15th. They are the only comprehensive mental health provider in East Alabama. Their mission is to help those in recovery while offering a full spectrum of mental health, substance use, and developmental disability services.

Learn more about their services at <https://integreahhealth.org/>





8th Annual Substance Use Consumer Recovery Training

ADMH staff, providers and partners had a wonderful time together at the 8th Annual Substance Use Consumer Recovery Training at Lake Gunter State Park, in August with over 200 individuals attending.





International Overdose Day

International Overdose Day was August 31st. To mark the awareness day, Alabama Department of Mental Health staff commemorated the occasion by wearing purple to raise awareness about overdose and showcase the different resources available.



Congratulations!

SHIRAH ARNOLD-SUTTLES

Congratulations to Shirah Arnold-Suttles for graduating with her master's and passing her BCBA exam.

LUCRYSTAL HOPKINS

Congrats to LuCrystal Hopkins for graduating from Troy University's IECMH Certificate Program.

BEVERLY JOHNSON

Beverly Johnson, Director of Child and Family Services was inducted as First Vice President of the National Prevention Network!

KATHY THOMPSON

Happy Retirement to Kathy Thompson, Personnel Specialist III! [View her Resolution here.](#)



Commissioner Boswell receives Award at VitAL Conference

Commissioner Boswell received the "Going to Bat Award" at the VitAL conference for her advocacy in the area of rural mental health and "going beyond the call of duty."



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Empower.
Support.

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