

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

**Monday, April 21, 2025**

**Location:**

**Alabama Industrial Institute (AIDT)**

**1 Technology Court**

**Montgomery, Alabama 36116**

**Attendees:** Council Member/Proxy – Alabama Medicaid Agency (Bennett Emfinger); Alabama Department of Mental Health (Beverly Johnson); Alabama Department of Human Resources (Sondra Landers); Adult (Robert Caldwell); Service Provider (Shelby DiPilla); Alabama Department of Insurance (Mark Fowler); Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (Wendy Glass) Service Provider (Erich Grommet); Autism Society of Alabama (Chenique Jeffress); Service Provider (Heather Jones); Alabama Department of Education (Elisabeth Newell); Parent (Jessica McCafferty); Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (Michelle McDaniel); Insurance Representative (Jake Schieber); American Academy of Pediatrics – Alabama Chapter (Justin Schwartz)

**Guests:** Stephanie Logan, Melody Crane, Melanie Holton, Mary Florian, Doris Hill, Beth Zaiontz, Martha Loukotka, Debbie Shoemaker, Allison Batlaglia, Sarah Olivas, Alan Deal, Sarah Ryan, Sarah Bailey, Rebechia Givhan, Michelle Creekmore, Wendy Pittard, Tammy Butterworth, Kristie Hanley, Cynthia Ellis, Jennifer Lopez, Paul Agostini, Megan Davis, Tish MacInnis

**Meeting Called to Order:** Chenique Jeffress

**Lead Agency Comments (Alabama Department of Mental Health):**

Welcomed attendees. Updates: Provided on the status of the Never Look Away trauma systems therapy training to occur on April 29-30, 2025, in Montgomery, Alabama. This will be the first setting of multiple trainings provided to individuals that work and care for children. Announced the resignation and departure of State Autism Coordinator, Anna McConnell and current transition plans within ADMH Autism Services. Beverly Johnson is serving in the State Autism Coordinator role for the purposes of the April AIACC meeting, but additional transitional guidance and points of contacts will be communicated.

**Motion was made to approve January Meeting Minutes.**

**State Coordinator Comments:** Combined with Lead Agency Comments.

### **Standards of Practice Reports:**

**Ages 0-5 Subcommittee:** Michelle McDaniel on behalf of Sarah O'Kelley. Co-chairs: Sarah O'Kelley, Ph.D. and Kimberly Tomeny, Ph.D. There are 4 workgroups within this subcommittee: Childcare (led by Stephanie Waters), Transition from Part C to Part B (led by Michelle McDaniel), EI screening pilot (led by Sarah O'Kelley and Mary Beth Vick), and EI mentor training (led by Mary Beth Vick and Angie Barber); CRS autism diagnostic clinics are also associated with some of this subcommittee's work (overlaps with Diagnostics and Health Subcommittee). Looking at 5 strategies that have been emphasized and implemented in the EI setting and apply it to 3-5-year-olds. Created working document and looking for funding to support some of the goals for this workgroup. Compiling resources for childcare providers to share when training is requested specific to autism. Looking at requests from HeadStart. In the process of developing a survey to learn more about the struggles caregivers face with accessing childcare, after-school care, summer care, and respite. The idea is to provide county and state-specific data for agencies applying for grants to expand these services for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Next meeting is May 15, 2025. Remaining meetings are as follows: August 21, 2025, and November 20, 2025. All meetings occur from 1:00-2:30 pm via zoom.

#### Part C Autism Initiative- Mentorship Component

The Department of Early Childhood Education awarded ADRS a three-year grant of \$993,000 to train, mentor, and support early childhood educators and providers to train and mentor childcare providers using five key ASD intervention strategies.

Along with the highly trained Part C ASD Mentors, ADRS will collaborate with Dr. Lea Yerby from the University of Alabama and Dr. Barber from Samford University to carry out this work. Together, they will coordinate efforts to deliver training, provide mentorship, and advocate for best practices in supporting young children who exhibit characteristics of Autism under age 5.

Thanks to DECE for this grant, which will continue the work funded previously by DECE to develop and train EI providers on best practice intervention strategies for children under age three with suspected Autism.

#### Part C Autism Initiative- Screening Component

Part C continues to provide MCHAT screenings at 7 EI programs and "priority referrals" to children who meet the qualifications (pilot). Since Jan. 1, 2025, fifteen priority referrals have been initiated through this ASD screening pilot.

#### CRS Autism Diagnostic Clinics

Continue to work with the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at UAB (Drs. Schwartz and O'Kelley) to provide teleconsultation and telementoring to CRS clinic teams to build ASD diagnostic capacity. Currently 2 active clinics, with one ready to resume clinic in May after ADOS training. After individuals in Tuscaloosa are trained, accepting referrals to the Tuscaloosa

office will resume. Need to identify additional physician partners to continue to expand the program statewide.

UCEDD – Disaster preparedness resources are being disseminated.

**Note: On 2/21/25, the AIACC and this subcommittee were recognized by First 5 Alabama with an “Advocacy and Innovation Award” for work in the 0-5 population.**

**Ages 6-13 Subcommittee:** Heather Jones – Continue to meet monthly. Next meeting will be held May 13, 2025, at 1:00 pm.

**Ages 14-20 Subcommittee:** Eric Grommet – Regular meetings resume next month. Seeking an ADMH point of contact for Community Waiver Program, Home & Community-Based Services, Waivers for ASD, ID threshold.

**Ages 21+ Subcommittee:** Sarah Ryan – Question: How to increase confidence in providers? Specifically looking at psychiatry. UAB Psychiatry conducted a Grand round. Discussion with stakeholders regarding curriculum development. Partnering with local resources.

**Diagnostics and Health Subcommittee:** Justin Schwartz – Defining tiers as it relates to a tiered system of diagnosis. Tier I: Presenting Symptoms; Tier II: To allow some variation; Tier III: Individuals with complex needs.

### **Regional Autism Network Directors:**

Across all five Regional Autism Network sites in Alabama, **460 individuals and families** were served through direct assistance; provided **230 technical assistance or consultation sessions** to professionals and hosted or attended **42 public education and training events** across the state. Families continue to reach out most often for therapy options like ABA, speech, and OT, help with school-related needs like IEPs and placements, access to childcare and preschool, and mental health resources for adolescents and adults.

However, ongoing challenges noted:

- A shortage of Medicaid providers for autism evaluations for kids over 5,
- Gaps in respite and summer care options,
- A lack of providers for adult diagnosis,
- And limited services in rural communities, especially on the western side of the state.

One notable disruption was the sudden closure of a private school serving neurodivergent students in North Alabama, which left many families scrambling.

On a positive note, USA RAN hosted a community roundtable discussion on the topic of summer and after-school care for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. As a result, the RAN team is working on a statewide survey to better document these challenges and push for more targeted funding and support by service providers.

Now looking ahead, there are several key events scheduled:

- **April 23:** UAB RAN is hosting a Lunch & Learn on the ABLE Savings Plan via Zoom
- **April 29:** UA RAN is hosting an Autism Resource Webinar, and UAH RAN's is hosting a North Alabama Autism Webinar
- **May 7–9:** UA RAN is hosting an ADOS-2 training with Dr. Stormi White from the Marcus Institute in Atlanta at the University of Alabama
- **May 13:** UAH and UA RAN are teaming up to offer a Sensory Summer Activities Webinar
- **May 14:** UAB RAN will host a Community Education Workshop on Anxiety and Depression in Homewood in partnership with Children's of Alabama Behavioral Health Center at Children's Behavioral Health Patriot Park in Homewood, AL
- **May 27:** UAB RAN is also offering a School Needs Binder training in Lineville in partnership with Alabama Parent Education Center and ARC of Clay County at Lineville Baptist Church Family Support Meeting in Lineville, AL
- **June 11:** UAB RAN is hosting a Lunch & Learn on Best Buddies (Zoom)
- **June 18:** UAB RAN Workshop on Challenging Behaviors in Birmingham in partnership with Behavioral Pediatric Institute of Alabama in Birmingham.
- **July 22 & 24:** RAN and the South Alabama Regional Inservice Center will once again collaborate to offer two "Summer Autism Series" training sessions for educators through PowerSchool.
- **December 3–5:** UA RAN will host a 3-day ADOS-2 training workshop with Dr. Stormi White from the Marcus Institute in Atlanta at the University of Alabama.
- **Monthly:** USA RAN continues to hold Disability Resource Fairs in Mobile
- **TBA:** USA RAN and ADAP will also be collaborating on rural training sessions later this summer

This report demonstrates not only the volume of work being done but also the coordinated impact across Alabama.

### **Funding and Finance:**

Updates:

- Behavior Analyst Licensing Board – Newly appoint chairperson: Lauren Elliott. Meeting was held April 10, 2025. Ashley Alls, ADMH Administrative Support Assistant, will be assisting with administrative functions. Focus of next phase is complaints, compliance, and ethics.
- Public and Private Insurance – No updates.

**Member Updates:**

- Achilles House – Safety meetings to connect with first responders. Work is being completed on water safety. Exploring and offering trainings via zoom for accessibility.
- Letter submissions to state and federal officials for Autism Day.
- AIDB – Center opens in Decatur for 3–5-year-olds. The biggest concern is early diagnostic. There is parent education with a focus on empowering parents.
- Autism Support of Alabama – Walk for Autism 2025. Locations include Boaz, Dothan, Tuscaloosa, Huntsville, Fort Payne, Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery, and Enterprise. Upcoming camp activities and information can be found at [Autism Family Camp Weekend – Autism Support of Alabama](#). Plans are underway to resume webinars.

**General Announcements:**

- Tish MacInnis mentioned that CDC will not be printing as of September 2025. However, she is willing to share available resources.
- Webinar opportunities – Profound Autism Alliance.
- Beverly Johnson thanked Autism Acceptance Proclamation attendees: Doris Hill, Jenny Morris, and Mashannan Starks.
- Dr. Grommet posed the question surrounding Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and inquired whether protections would be extended to gender identity.
- Arc of Madison – Added clinics in Selma and Tuscaloosa. Total of 4,374 referrals, 1768 diagnostic evaluations, and 1,061 of those had an ASD diagnosis. Of the 1,061, 854 have Medicaid. Referred to EI, AIDB, etc. Approximately 81% are low income. Longest waitlist is approximately 4 months in Huntsville. Conducting home-based visits for 3-5-year-olds.

**Next Meeting Date:** July 21, 2025

Meeting Adjournment by Chenique Jeffries.