

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, July 21, 2025

Location:

Alabama Industrial Institute (AIDT)

1 Technology Court

Montgomery, Alabama 36116

Attendees: Alabama Department of Mental Health (Beverly Johnson); Heather Jones (BCBA Pelham City Schools), American Academy of Pediatrics – Alabama Chapter (Justin Schwartz); Sarah Bailey (RAN); Autism Society of Alabama (Chenique Jeffress); Alabama Department of Human Resources (Sondra Landers); Service Provider (Erich Grommet); proxy for Shelby DiPilla; UAB RAN (Kristie Ford); Wendi Glass for Dennis Gilliam.

Guests: Delia Hasberry, Gwendolyn Brown, Debbie Bailey, Erica Bradberry, Beth Zaiontz, Norma Lemley, Melody Crane, Lee Walters, Kelly Goff, Alexa Pepper, Lexi Berry, Latisha Wilson, Cecilia Ballinger, Andrea McCoy, Laura, Senn, Stephanie Anderson, Michelle Herrera, Mary Florian, Ashley Alls.

Meeting Called to Order: Chenique Jeffress

Roll Call was completed

Lead Agency Comments (Alabama Department of Mental Health): Beverly acknowledged the work of Autism Services in the absence of a state coordinator and reassured hopes for filling this position by September. Autism services has been able to expand provider network since the last meeting. Discussed the finalization of FY26 RAN agreements and asked to meet with the RAN after the committee meeting. Discussed the continuation of imbedding autism services in strategic planning but also seeking to maximize efforts and leverage resources and exploring avenues and methods to address adults.

Beverly asked for all to provide any input that could possibly be beneficial being that autism services is currently transitioning and awaiting new leadership. She encouraged members to reach out and inform her if anything is being overlooked so that the council can remain as

current as possible. She then thanked everyone for their continued commitment and dedication to autism services.

Motion was made to approve April Meeting Minutes.

New Business

Standards of Practice Reports:

Ages 0-5 Subcommittee: Michelle McDaniel on behalf of Sarah O’Kelley

MCHAT Screening Initiative ongoing youth and early intervention to identify children with autism evaluations; advancing autism initiative which was an early intervention initiative to identify five evidence based strategies to support early interventionist in the home with coaching and technical assistance (for children who have a diagnosis of autism or characteristics of autism); autism clinics in Homewood, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa- providing transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary autism assessments/ attending monthly sessions nationwide to offer training and case discussions; Recent accomplishments of the workgroup subcommittee - identifying gaps in childcare’s knowledge of the needs assessments done there to support children with autism/ Workgroup created a Resource Document aimed at looking into the transition of Part C to Part B in order to better address the 3 to 5 year old population; New grant through the University of Alabama in collaboration with UCP of West Alabama -expanding access to early autism services in Alabama, strengthening community expertise- awarded through the Department of Early Childhood Education (to build upon what’s been done in the autism services initiative). RANs conducting survey now related to childcare in addition to respite care as well -hoping to understand families’ barriers and challenges in accessing care (childcare, summer care, after school care, etc.); Also working on a document to show the work that the subcommittee has done that can be shared with other agencies across the state- Target start date is this coming Fall (possibly October). Series of virtual workshops have been held with RAN family navigators to help childcare providers see the family’s perspective – ‘how to talk to parents about concerns for autism’- needing a better understanding of early intervention processes and transitions.

A question was asked: Is there a reason that the subcommittee is not being included on the behind-the-scenes work?

Response: The subcommittee has been involved but the workgroup has not met because there hasn’t been anything to do.

Ages 6-13 Subcommittee: Dr. Heather Jones-

Continues to meet monthly. Teacher trainings and parent trainings; updated summer training resources list; worked as a group to share resources; completed MEGA conference; two upcoming workshops they are preparing for. Sessions tomorrow 171 registered, Thursday over 100 registered.

Ages 14-20 Subcommittee: Dr. Erich Grommet-

Met in May, but not in June due to holiday. Focus has been on refining responses to waiver program public comments- town hall meeting for community waiver program. The responses will be placed up on the website but will be happy to email them if anyone is interested. Summary of the points that were focused on- expanding eligibility to include autistic adults without intellectual disability implore the states to modernize the intellectual disability definition to reflect the importance of adaptive functioning -which is something that the American Psychiatric Association expresses- aligning provider qualifications with the state licensure law (there is a problem in many of those services where the state says you should be doing as waiver provider does not meet its licensure requirements for behavior analysis and other mental health professionals). Streamline access to behavior support and other mental health services (currently long wait-typically 15-20 rejections before you get approval; often time when a rejection occurs it is not for things that are not within the state guidelines-but instead small issues). Update reimbursement rates to match workforce demands so currently in waiver programs for mental health services Alabama pays about 50% less for equitable services than traditional Medicaid. Revised the behavior support and other mental health guidelines through a state task force currently which have been written by those who don't know much regarding the implementation.

Adults / Ages 21+-

Subcommittee is working on building connections that will allow for training of employers and how to support autistic adults.

Diagnostics and Health-

Have not met – however there have been many questions on what the diagnostic and health group should look like and how it should serve. On a federal level, still trying to figure out how to best navigate. But would like to see how the subcommittee and the new state coordinator will be able to come together to determine how this group can best be utilized moving forward.

Regional Autism Network

Kristie Ford UAB-

On behalf of the RAN covering from April 1- June 30th, from 5 RAN sites there were 480 instances of direct assistance to individuals and families; 212 technical assistance and

consultations to providers and agencies; trained over 339 professionals; and reached more than 13,000 people through in person public education and outreach efforts; UAB continue focus on public education through workshops and lunch and learn sessions on special education, rights, challenging behaviors, mental health, and financial planning tools. UA RAN hosted an ADOS-2 training in Tuscaloosa and participated in several outreach events including the DCH Health Fair and Summer Jam providing face to face support to hundreds of families and professionals. USA RAN continued their work in rural and underserved communities- this included collaborating with ADAP to host workshops and working with faith-based leaders to promote autism and inclusion in community programs. UAH RAN participated in numerous community resource fairs reaching over 3,000 individuals and continued building partnerships through coalitions focused on transportation, adult services, and disability inclusion in north Alabama. AU RAN was active across central and southeast Alabama presenting at conferences and community events and offering targeted support to Spanish speaking families through training, navigation, and outreach materials.

Challenges across regions: Shortage of providers in rural counties (especially for ABA, OT, speech, and mental health); limited availability of respite and adult services; difficulty in finding Medicaid accepting providers.

To address these issues, the RAN collaborated on a statewide survey which is already in circulation which will provide concrete data that will help in advocating for additional funding, resources, and program development (particularly around after school care, respite, and higher-level supports).

Looking ahead:

1. UA and USA RAN are partnering with the Alabama Regional Inservice Center to hosts teacher training sessions this week. These sessions are focused on providing practical strategies for educators working with autistic students in the classroom setting.
2. UAB RAN has some educational events including lunch and learn sessions and community education workshops; Aug 13th -Lunch and Learn (Transition with Martha from Horizon School); Aug 20th – Parental Rights in Special Education and Self-Advocacy (Spanish Only); Sept 3rd – Lunch and Learn Financial Empowerment; September 17th- in person workshop with IEP 101: Creating a Paper Trail; Oct 15th – in person workshop “Sleep and Autism”.
3. UA RAN will host Project Impact Advanced on Oct 20th -21st in person- designed for professionals/ \$750 pp. Sept 9th first regional parent care binder make and take workshop at the Fayette Memorial Library.

Funding and Finance-

ABA Licensure Board now has a part time paid employee to assist with day to day. The board continues to go through a transition, but stabilization has occurred. Much work of the board has not been focused on ethic complaints and scope of practice issues. Hoping to meet with Eliza Belle the ADMH Psychology and Behavioral Services Director and try to work on bringing some of those state services in line with state licensure law because there has been a long-standing issue of the state providing mental health services that don't coincide with licensure laws.

Member Updates-

LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Other Related Disabilities) starting our next training cohort accepting applications now on the website (<https://sites.uab.edu/cedd/programs/lend/>). Nutrition and public health trainees are needed. Also, Simpson Ramsey Neurodevelopment Symposium will be held April 30th, 2026. (<https://sites.uab.edu/cedd/events/annual-symposium/>)

The Autism Support of Alabama- still accepting applications for Camp Frog until July 29th for the two dates in September. Still accepting applications for post-secondary scholarship and that's for after high school if they are going to college or if they are in a day program, or technical school they can get \$1,000 towards that program. Autism Shines Gala will be held next month in Birmingham, AL at the Marriott.

Shelby has been traveling with other RBT's to teach water and swimming safety around the state. They were recently in Anniston for two days to work with swim teachers and children with autism; they have another one coming up in Ozark and continue to go throughout the state of Alabama. They also have a food truck that they are using to teach teenagers with autism how to work with food, customers, and money.

CRS - Working with Medicaid to submit a state plan amendment to add psychologists as a provider type for CRS that's specifically related to autism diagnostic clinics now in a partnership with early intervention; they are also adding physicians' assistants. They are also exploring expanding the CRS autism diagnostic clinics to internal referrals and expanding to age 7.

Jacqueline Navidad – Posed a concern regarding the immigrant families and children- orders were given on the federal level that stopped mental health centers from being able to serve immigrant families who are undocumented. What will this look like? Do we deny services?

General Announcements-

Arc of Madison County – has been serving children for 3 months in Tuscaloosa and Selma. They have taken 5300 referrals and tested over 2200 children. About 30% of those children have not received early intervention services; making sure that they are referred to early intervention making sure that it is not just about the testing but also connecting them to the right services that they need (autism, genetics, or something else). Looking into expanding home visitation from 2-5 years to 2–11-year-olds as well as expanding diagnostics to 11-year-olds.

Motion to Adjourn by Chenique Jeffress.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: October 20th, 2025, at AIDT.