

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, October 20, 2025

Location:

Alabama Industrial Institute (AIDT)

1 Technology Court

Montgomery, Alabama 36116

Attendees: Alabama Department of Mental Health (Beverly Johnson); American Academy of Pediatrics – Alabama Chapter (Justin Schwartz); Autism Society of Alabama (Chenique Jeffress); Service Provider (Erich Grommet); Service Provider (proxy for Shelby DiPilla); Wendi Glass for Dennis Gilliam; Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (proxy for Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw); Service Provider (Heather Jones), Service Provider (Melanie Bald); UCEDD (Sarah O’Kelley).

Guests: Michelle Creekmore, Wendy Pittard, Allison Battaglia, Martha Loukotka, Sarah Olivas, Sarah Bailey, Paul Agostini, Casey Bailey, Sarah Housley, Maria Gutierrez, Doris Hill, Mary Lorino, Audrey Bence, Sonja Stuart, Demetrius Price, Andrea Hutchings, Brittany Marzette, Megan Davis, Mary Florian, Andrea McCoy, Dalphine Wilson, Kortiti Pringle, Sarah Ryan.

Meeting Called to Order: Chenique Jeffress

Roll Call was completed

General introductions from the floor were completed.

Lead Agency Comments (Alabama Department of Mental Health): Beverly reminded everyone that per the last meeting the department was in the process of exploring possible individuals for the state autism coordinator position. She announced that the role had been filled by Dr. Chelsea Taylor who will later provide an introduction. Beverly then stated that there is a vacancy in region 1 (Huntsville) for Region Autism Coordinator. The department is actively seeking to fill that position as soon as possible. In addition, there were discussions relative to the membership composition and the applications that came in because of membership for the

coordinating council; those have been submitted to Commissioner Boswell, and we are in the process of moving forward with those membership submissions. Also, Dr. Taylor has reached out to many of you regarding plans as we move forward and this will be relative to aspects of previous needs assessments, or the need to have a needs assessment as it relates to autism services as we all are aware that we are seeking to maximize services in this area.

Motion was made to approve July Meeting Minutes.

New Business

Standards of Practice Reports:

Ages 0-5 Subcommittee: Dr. O'Kelley

Dr. O'Kelley reminded everyone that this subcommittee covers many systems, agencies, target needs; what they have focused on has been collaborating with EI and CRS to increase the identification of ASD in young children. Taken advantage of funds that were leveraged to focus on that purpose to build a system-this work is ongoing. Pilot EI site, using screening tool used to identify autism within referred children for early intervention as apart of the eligibility process. Once children are identified, and if the family agrees, they are then referred to a priority referral clinic in their area, which also includes the CRS clinics that are also piloting diagnostic clinics as well.

Recently recentered and are looking to expand the access to the site including EI and work on the diagnostic and screening needs for 0-5. No updates on the project that is happening with ADRS for the extension of the autism mentor model to 3-5, still in development. Looking to have an update in the next council meeting. Increasing awareness and understanding the transition from birth to three to part B services. Significant needs of childcare providers who are wanting to support children with autism but don't necessarily have the resources to do so. Those efforts are being led by Michelle McDaniel and Stephanie Waters. They have reported that their key successes have been strengthening communication and collaboration between agencies. Created a statewide resource document outlining correct professional development supports related to autism. Continued partnerships between ADAP, RAN, APEC hosting in person and virtual workshops which focused primarily on navigating the transition from early intervention to part b services, providing input on transition focused sessions offered at major statewide conferences. The RAN launching the statewide survey assessing barriers to respite and after school childcare programs; hopefully this data will help caregivers and providers to advocate for greater service capacity and strengthen funding efforts. As a residual of this workgroup's efforts, the following initiatives have been started: new Department of Early Childhood Education grant has been launched with the University of Alabama in collaboration with Samford University and UCP of

West Alabama entitled *Expanding Access to Early Autism Services in Alabama Strengthening Community Expertise*.

ADMH received a 5-year grant from SAMHSA for Promoting Positive Early Experiences and Relationships in Alabama (PPEER) (Jackson, Jefferson, and Mobile counties for 3–5-year-olds). Next steps for this work group will be to reassess priorities and identify next steps. The next meeting is Friday November 14th at 9am via zoom led by Michelle McDaniel and Stephanie Waters. The group will also investigate how they can continue to advocate for evidence-based strategies that can be implemented across settings for children 0-5. Providing insight to key players at the state level, asking for input, advocating for participation in the conversation. If you would like to be apart of this subcommittee you can always reach out to Dr. O’Kelley or you can request to be added via the AIACC website <https://mh.alabama.gov/aiacc/>.

Ages 6-13 Subcommittee: Dr. Heather Jones-

The focus has been on the services for school age. This group has focused on collaboration with the state department of education for training, disseminating, and getting information out there for families and teachers. Even with the RAN and the many service providers in the state, there are still many resources that people aren’t aware of. Working to look at where is the fragmentation of services. Collaborative efforts with the 0-5 group as well as Alabama Family Central. Continuing to look at where we are going to go next strategically for these workgroups. We also continue to meet the second Tuesday of every month via zoom at 1:00pm.

Ages 14-20 Subcommittee: Dr. Grommet-

Getting back on track with regular meetings. We met on August 4th at 1:00pm. Some follow up with Dr. Belle at Psychological Behavioral Services regarding ID waiver- she seemed receptive in having a state task force looking at the waiver because it maybe doesn’t have the input that it needs from everybody. With Dr. Taylor in place perhaps we can look at adding autism to the ID waiver to bring us in line with most of the US (46 states have a residential waiver for autism). Feel free to join our subgroup if you are interested- we meet first Monday of the month via zoom.

Adults / Ages 21+: Dr. Ryan-

We have some of our committee members who have some connections that we are using trying to get our foot in the door to create some trainings for potential employers. In communications with Dr. Taylor about the needs assessment- as a committee it is difficult because we recognize that there are so many needs; we are wanting to see how to proceed in a meaningful way. We will possibly look at that needs assessment and see if we can revamp our goals.

Diagnostics and Health: Dr. Schwartz-

This committee has been inactive in trying to determine what the direction of the council is going in. It's been an interesting time- those who are in the medical world are exhausted by the recent press conference that our administration had in relation to acetaminophen exposure and related to leucovorin. It has been dominant in our day to day lives in helping to navigate through this. It is imperative to think about what the role of this subcommittee is to the council and the community is going to be important to discuss going forward as we think about what our charge is. We have seen this a lot in the world of autism but the more we have of misrepresentation and of data, the more the door is open for opportunistic types of activities that may or may not be in line with what the actual data and evidence shows. We must figure out what our mission is and how to be most effective. We want to figure out how this committee should operate moving forward.

Dr. Grommet- Are you getting a lot of inquiries about Tylenol?

Dr. Schwartz- Yes, we are, every day in clinic we are talking about it. I have lost track of how many pediatricians have been asking questions. It has really been challenging as a field. We have many statements that have been made by many professional societies regarding these concerns. There is also a lot of variability as far as what the community is doing which has the potential to generate mixed messages in terms of what the nuances of the actual state of the science says.

Dr. Grommet- Do you have a sense of what the supply looks like for people who do need leucovorin?

Dr. Schwartz- That is a challenge. I have spoken with one pharmacy, and they would probably be looking at depletion of their own supply as well as a back order for patients who are currently being seen at Children's who are receiving cancer treatments who need leucovorin- this has been a huge concern. One of the lead researchers of leucovorin was mentioned in a Kaiser Family Foundation newsletter for looking into starting his own for-profit company that's going to manufacture the right version of leucovorin for children with autism.

Maria Gutierrez- As a council, when we have families contacting us about what do we do. Where do we refer the families? There should be something coming from the state that we can actually refer families to.

Dr. Schwartz- From a community standpoint, we hope that the advice of speak with your trusted primary care provider- this is always the advice that I like to give. Right now, even the statement that we have from the AAP and the field of pediatrics, even the statements that we have, each practitioner is going to be different in regard to what they actually say. But again, there is a lot of variation out there and I still would recommend people to the statements that have been made.

Dr. O'Kelley- Maria I heard in your question about additional guidance on a local level. I think the reason that we have landed on those external statements is that I am not sure if the statements

are worthy of so much attention. So, what we did was collected all the statements that we could, and we provide that.

Links that Dr. O'Kelley sent regarding statements to provide families:

<https://uab.box.com/s/jvmltmmi2u9ls7mt5cgxt89ccj50k28s>

[SDBP Statements regarding leucovorin, Tylenol and autism - Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics](#)

Sarah Bailey provides this link for resource from the Association for Science in Autism Treatment (ASAT):

[Becoming a Savvy Consumer/Educator - ASAT Online](#)

Regional Autism Network

Sarah Bailey (UAH) -

Conducting a caregiving survey statewide to learn what care needs are needed for all ages (childcare, respite, summer camp). We have some on the back table but if you would like a digital copy, just email us at RAN and we can provide that for you. Between July and September 2025, Alabama's RAN has collectively served 17,630 individuals statewide through direct assistance, technical consultation, professional training and public education. This quarter reflected the strength of a unified network with five universities working collaboratively to expand access, reduce barriers, and improve outcomes for individuals with autism and their families.

UAH RAN reached more than 7,000 individuals through education outreach- marking the highest public engagement statewide (this included a large community event for our Latino families).

UAB RAN continues to lead a statewide collaboration through its caregiving survey; now completed by more than 200 families (which is now over 300 families since report was written). UAB RAN hosted workshops on toilet training, IEP advocacy- including a Spanish language event, special education binder creation along with several lunch and learns regarding transitions to adulthood and financial empowerment.

UA RAN increased its visibility and impact to participation in the MEGA conference connecting with more than 2,300 educators, professionals, and service providers. And the team advances care binder, caregiver training, supportive regional and service collaboration and continued preparations for the upcoming ADOS-2 certification training in partnership with OTIDE.

USA RAN maintained consistent engagement with families and professionals across the region. They partnered with ADAP to deliver community workshops in Baldwin, Clark, and Perry counties-focused on navigating Medicaid, waivers, and special education. Hosted multiple

disability resource fairs in Mobile to strengthen connections between families and providers and will be co-hosting developing social skills at home virtual training with UAH in December.

AU RAN delivered a diverse slate of professional and community trainings including HeadStart, CasaConnect, and DHR sessions and participated in conferences reaching over 700 professionals and families. Team efforts remain centered on outreach to underserved and minority populations strengthening local partnerships and access in rural counties.

Across all five regions, shared challenges persist. RAN reported ongoing shortages in diagnostic and therapeutic providers particularly for those that are adults and those that are covered by Medicaid. Childcare and respite services remain scarce to families seek adult transition and vocational programs encounter limited options statewide. These gaps continue to create strain for both families and service systems. To address these issues, we are going to leverage the data from the statewide caregiver survey to advocate for targeted funding and service expansion. Looking ahead RAN regions will focus on expanding adult transition services, strengthening professional training, pipeline, improving statewide access to diagnostic therapeutic supports. Major initiatives on the horizon include the ADOS-2 training, the UAB lunch and learn series, and the USA/UAH virtual workshop.

Upcoming events: Oct 27-29 Early Intervention Preschool Conference in Mobile presenting; Oct 28th the Disability Resource Fair at Strada Patient Care Center in Mobile; Nov 5th Lunch and Learn with UAB RAN and Tourism Alabama with Leslie Walker; Nov 6th Seizure First Aid training with UAH and the Epilepsy Foundation; Nov 13th Community Workshop Navigating special Education and Medicaid Waiver with ADAP and USA RAN; Nov 19th Lunch and Learn with Alabama Lifespan Respite; Date TBD Lunch and Learn What I Didn't Know, I Didn't Know with UAB RAN a virtual workshop on developing social skills at home with UAH and USA RAN and Dr. Jordan Albright; ADOS-2 workshop UAH RAN and OTIDE; and Medicaid Waiver Special Ed IEP training with UAH RAN with ADAP in Scottsboro.

Funding and Finance-

Beverly Johnson: Andrea Hutchins is lending her services to assist with organizing and ensuring that we have the proper infrastructure as it relates to the licensure board. We are grateful to have her in that interim position so that we can make sure that we are appropriately navigating the processes as it relates to the licensure board. We also have Brittany Marzette who is assisting in that capacity. Ashley Alls, who was our administrative assistant, is no longer with the department so we are in the process of having that position filled as well. But we want to ensure that as a department that we have an infrastructure in place. So, we thank Andrea for assuming that role and if you have any updates that you want to provide or if you want to just provide something moving forward.

Andrea Huntchins: The ABA Board went through Sunset Committee a few weeks ago and they were very close to being sunsetted which would greatly impact those we serve. ADMH stepped

in to assist this board. We had a meeting last week and we are in the process of getting policies and procedures set up so that we can really take this board and elevate it to the next level to ensure that it is serving in the highest capacity.

Chenique Jeffress: Do we have anything with public and private insurance updates?

Jake Schieber: No updates on the insurance side.

Member Updates-

Dr. O'Kelley: Generally, you all have the Alabama Autism Conference on your calendars (Feb 27th). We have a list of confirmed speakers, but we are still filling spots, but we will open the day with Alycia Halladay (CFO of the Autism Science Foundation), Cas Breau (BCBA), Roma Vasa, MD (Psychiatrist)- dual diagnoses and anxiety, Dr. Heather Jones-functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. The preconference will be focused on speech language interventions in autism. Our confirmed personal perspective presenters are Dr. Kelvin Smith (adult with ASD) and his mother LaRita Smith.

Autism Support of Alabama will be having scholarships that are available from now to January 16th so it can apply for parent educators for scholarship for the Autism Conference. We will also have a parent social gathering that Thursday night prior to the Autism Conference where we will provide childcare.

General Announcements-

Dr. Grommet: We expect by January 2026 to have a diagnostic clinic open which will be an option for people looking for diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or other developmental disorders in general. Another option that will hopefully bring the waitlists down in the state. I am also running for the president of the Alabama Association for Behavior Analysis.

Motion to Adjourn by Chenique Jeffress.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: January 26th, 2026, at AIDT.