

The Outlook

Alabama Department of Mental Health Newsletter



Comprehensive Plan for Veterans' Mental Health Spurs New Programs and Funding

Alabama is expanding mental health services for veterans and their families following the release of a new comprehensive report by the Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee (VMHSC) and strong legislative support for its recommendations.

Submitted to Gov. Kay Ivey in Summer 2025, the VMHSC Comprehensive Plan is the first statewide plan for veterans' mental health services. It outlines four key priorities: improving lethal means safety; enhancing crisis, behavioral health and care transitions; increasing access to effective care; and addressing upstream risk and protective factors.

Established in 2024, the 20-member VMHSC is chaired by Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner Kimberly Boswell and includes representatives from government and private organizations serving veterans.

During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers advanced several initiatives aligned with the report, including passage of the Houston/Hunter Act, which created SAFER Together, a voluntary program allowing individuals in crisis to temporarily store firearms with licensed dealers.

The Legislature also approved \$12 million to expand services for veterans, including \$5 million for the Alabama Veterans Resource Center, \$3 million for veteran pilot programs, \$1.5 million to continue successful pilots, and \$2.5 million to expand the Traumatic Brain Injury Program at the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

The Alabama Veterans Resource Center, set to open in downtown Montgomery in early 2026, will provide career, education and support services while connecting veterans to mental health and community resources statewide.

Pilot program funding from state opioid settlement funds to expand treatment choices and access to

care for veterans has been awarded to AltaPointe Health, Centerstone, The Shoulder, Sojourn Counseling and UWill. Contact each provider for more information and services.

Together, these efforts mark a significant step forward in strengthening access to mental health care and support for Alabama's veteran community.



ADMH Capitol Showcase Art Exhibition Returns in May 2026

The Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) is preparing to host its annual Capitol Showcase Art Exhibition in observance of National Mental Health Month this May

Since 2005, the exhibition has provided a platform for Alabama artists who are experiencing or have experienced mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, or co-occurring disorders to share their creativity with the public.

The 2026 exhibition will run May 1 through May 31 at the Old Supreme Court Library of the Alabama State Capitol. Visitors will be able to tour the Capitol, view the artwork, and learn more about the experiences and stories behind each piece.

For questions or to join the Capitol Showcase mailing list for calls for entry, contact Peggy Olson at 334-353-7538.

The Capitol Showcase continues to highlight the talent and creativity of Alabamians living with mental health and developmental challenges.



Alabama's Mental Health License Plate – Look for it on the road this Spring!

Alabama now has a permanent way to show support for mental health across the state.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health's (ADMH) Mental Health License Plate has successfully passed the pre-commitment phase and will now join the state's roster of permanent specialty plates.

This plate is Alabama's first and only license plate dedicated to mental health, providing residents with a unique opportunity to raise awareness while supporting important services. Proceeds from the plate will go directly toward ADMH, helping to fund mental communication and outreach for Alabamians in need.

The plate will be available for order throughout the year, allowing residents to proudly display their support while contributing to statewide mental health efforts. ADMH encourages all Alabamians to consider adding the plate to their vehicle as a simple, ongoing way to help spread awareness and fund crucial programs.

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Want to be included in the next issue?

Send us your stories, achievements and events!

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2025 Year in Review – A Year told through Achievements!

The Alabama Department of Mental Health has made significant strides and achieved notable milestones in 2025. The Alabama Department of Mental Health continues its mission of providing accessible services and resources to every Alabamian in need.

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EXPANDING CRISIS CARE ACROSS ALABAMA

In Spring 2025, the Alabama Crisis System of Care expanded again with the opening of the SpectraCare Crisis Center in Dothan, the sixth crisis center in Alabama. The center represents a significant investment in addressing behavioral health needs in the Wiregrass region.

The facility provides multiple levels of care, including short-term observation and extended stabilization, allowing individuals to receive timely support in a safe, therapeutic setting.

ADDRESSING VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH AND PTSD IN FIRST RESPONDERS

Alabama is expanding mental health services for veterans and their families after the Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee released the state's first comprehensive plan, submitted to Gov. Kay Ivey in summer 2025. The plan outlines four priorities: improving lethal means safety, strengthening crisis and behavioral health care, increasing access to effective treatment, and addressing upstream risk and protective factors. Recommendations in the 2025 session included passing the Houston/Hunter Act to create SAFER Together, a voluntary firearm storage program for individuals in crisis. The Legislature also approved \$12 million to expand services, funding the Alabama Veterans Resource Center, pilot programs, continued initiatives, and an expansion of the Traumatic Brain Injury Program.

The Interim Study Commission on PTSD in First Responders convened in fall and winter to examine how Alabama can better support firefighters, law enforcement officers, dispatchers, and other emergency personnel impacted by trauma. The commission's work centers on identifying gaps in services, improving coordination, and reducing barriers to care. The Alabama Department of Mental

Health played a key role in this effort, helping guide prevention, education, and communication strategies. Discussions focused on the need to better organize existing resources and ensure first responders know where and how to seek help without fear of professional consequences.

ADVANCING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

ADMH continued its focus on innovation in 2025 through the launch of Assistive Technology Demonstration Model Homes. Grants were awarded to community partners to establish model homes in Birmingham and Mobile, designed to showcase how assistive technology can support safe, sustainable independent living.

These homes function as hands-on learning environments where individuals, families, caregivers, and providers can explore real-world applications of technology.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS LICENSE PLATE

In 2025, Alabama reached an important milestone with the approval of the state's first mental health themed license plate for preorder. The plate's design and message promote awareness, spark conversation, and reinforce the importance of mental health across Alabama's communities.

The required 250 pre-commitments were successfully secured, allowing the tag to move forward as a permanent license plate. Proceeds will support the promotion of mental health resources statewide, further extending the department's outreach and education efforts.

STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE THROUGH 988

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline remains a critical entry point for individuals seeking immediate mental health support. In FY 2025 alone, Alabama received 40,053 contacts, with an average of 90% calls answered in-state.

A strong in-state answer rate is essential, as local counselors are best equipped to connect callers with Alabama-specific resources and services. Continued emphasis on in-state response helps ensure faster, more effective support for individuals in crisis.

OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND NALOXONE DISTRIBUTION

Naloxone (Narcan) continues to be a key tool in preventing overdose deaths across Alabama. In 2025, ADMH distributed 47,325 naloxone kits to 334 organizations statewide. Since March 2023, nearly 97,000 kits have been distributed through partnerships with hundreds of providers and community organizations.

These efforts reflect Alabama's ongoing commitment to saving lives through prevention and education.

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking forward, ADMH will continue building on the progress made in 2025 by expanding access to services, strengthening partnerships, and promoting innovative approaches to care. Through continued collaboration and investment, Alabama remains committed to advancing a behavioral health system that is responsive and that's focused on long-term wellbeing.



ADMH Teams Up with Innovation Unplugged for an Engaging Episode

Perry Goins, Staff Development Manager at the Alabama Department of Mental Health, joins hosts Houston Blackwood and Matt Heaton on the Innovation Unplugged podcast to discuss how Alabama is strengthening and preparing its mental health workforce through modern training and statewide partnerships.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month Preview

March brings national recognition to several awareness efforts that focus on health, history, and community well-being. March is recognized nationwide as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

In Alabama, an estimated 2.5 percent of residents are born with or develop a disability, highlighting the importance of continued education, access to services, and community awareness. Throughout the month, planned activities will focus on sharing information, highlighting available resources, and recognizing the role individuals with developmental disabilities play in communities across the state.

As March approaches, more information will be shared about upcoming events and opportunities connected to Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.



ADMH Staff Spotlight: LaWendy Meadows Willis

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I grew up in Waverly, Alabama, a small town in Chambers County just outside of Auburn, where I currently reside. I am married to Demetruis Willis and am blessed with two adult children, Amber and Aliyah, and four amazing grandchildren who bring me so much joy.

HOBBIES

I enjoy traveling and spending meaningful time with my family. I also love laughing as often as possible, as well as renovating and selling real estate.

PAST CAREERS

I spent more than 20 years in education as an English teacher and school counselor. More recently, I worked in private practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), serving individuals and families and further strengthening my clinical experience.

CURRENT WORK AT ADMH AND COLLABORATION

I currently serve as an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant with the Alabama Department of Mental Health. In this role, I collaborate with multiple offices and community partners to support early identification, intervention, and coordinated services for children.

WHY I CHOSE THIS WORK

I chose to work as an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant because early intervention has the power to change the trajectory of a child's life. Addressing mental health needs during the earliest stages supports families, strengthens relationships, and leads to more positive long-term outcomes for children, families, and the communities.

Training in identifying and managing three specific comorbid mental health conditions in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Participants will:

- Learn about three comorbid psychological conditions among the ID/DD population (Bi-Polarity, Schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder).
- Learn how to identify potential undiagnosed or underdiagnosed individuals.
- Learn care and coping strategies for each of these conditions.

V.2 Understanding Comorbidity among IDD/DD populations:

March 20, 2026: Noon: Webex



<http://admh.webex.com/admh/j.php?MTID=mfdd90bde471bbe2713a9ff053e90cd81>

Join Us
For Our
50th Celebration

**MARCH
23-27
2026**

ASADS
Alabama School of Alcohol and Other Drug Studies

BRYANT CONFERENCE CENTER

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

**ADMH STAFF REGISTRATION
OPENS FEBRUARY**

REGISTER TODAY

2026 Stigma Summits



February 19

Mobile – Renaissance Riverview

February 20

Prattville – Montgomery Marriott
Hotel & Conference Center

February 23

Huntsville – Jackson Center

February 24

Birmingham – Hyatt Regency,
The Wynfrey

February 25

Dothan – Wiregrass Public
Safety Center

\$40 full day, breakfast & lunch included

7:30 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

6 hours of instruction available

VitALAlabama.com





Congratulations and Success!!

Region III CWP Support Coordination had the pleasure and privilege of presenting for the third year in a row at Augusta Evans School in Mobile, Alabama. During their visit, they provided detailed information and resources about the Community Waiver Program (CWP).



Serve.
Empower.
Support.

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