

# Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, January 26, 2026

Location:

Zoom

**Attendees:** Heather Jones (BCBA Pelham City Schools), proxy for Secretary Ami Brooks; proxy for Commissioner Burdeshaw; American Academy of Pediatrics – Alabama Chapter (Justin Schwartz); UCEDD (Dr. O’Kelley); proxy for Dr. Eric Mackey; Insurance representative (Jake Scheiber); ACDD (Darryle Powell); Autism Society of Alabama (Chenique Jeffress); Service Provider (Erich Grommet); Service Provider (Shelby DiPilla); UAB RAN (Kristie Ford); Wendi Glass for Dennis Gilliam.

**Guests:** Maria Gutierrez, Delia Hasberry, Gwendolyn Brown, Heather Sims, Erica Bradberry, Sylvia Bowen, Kristie Hamby, Kristie Ford, Bethany Graham, Karmelia Brown, Cody Farmer, Laura Senn, Kelly Ingram, Olivia Ward, Kimberly Mentink, Sarah Steib, Michelle McDaniel, Sarah Bailey, Stephanie Cole, Brittany Marzette, Norma Lemley, Melody Crane, Lee Walters, Kelly Goff, Alexa Pepper, Lexi Berry, Cecilia Ballinger, Andrea McCoy, Stephanie Anderson, Michelle Herrera, Mary Florian, Mary Lorino, Wendy Pittard, Jenny Ryan, Doris Hill, Debbie Bailey, Sarah Olivas, Alan Deal, Audrey Bence, Stephanie Anderson, Laura Hansen, Quincy Pearson, Tish McInnis, Beth Zaiontz, Mary-Claire Weeks, Sarah Ryan, Allison Battaglia, Kelly Goff, Melody Crane, Marc Williams, Rohaun Green, Casey Bailey, Sheri Miller.

**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):** Dr. Taylor discussed current council vacancies and those pending applications that are currently being processed and

reviewed in hopes that those positions will be filled soon as we don't want them to remain vacant for an extended amount of time.

### **Motion was made to approve October Meeting Minutes.**

**State Coordinator Comments:** Dr. Taylor stated that we are continuing to provide services to families in the state. We are looking into some needed restructuring, but we are also in a waiting period.

Dr. Grommet- What do you mean by restructuring?

Dr. Taylor- We are looking into how we can further the services that we provide within Autism Services, and we are waiting to hear from leadership in regard to this.

### **New Business**

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

Ages 0-5 Subcommittee: Sarah O'Kelley

Dr. O'kelley provided a brief update- the subcommittee meets four times a year; the last meeting was held on Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>- screening initiative within EI sites and pilot sites is ongoing. Expansion is on hold as next steps are figured out. The autism specific clinics within CRS are ongoing; there are three that are active currently. The biggest limitation being physicians that are willing to join this initiative. Also in the subcommittee: RAN provided information related to their survey focused on access to childcare, summer programs, respite, and after school care. Mitchell's Place reminded the group that they have classroom consultation services that are available. Next meeting for subcommittee is February 19<sup>th</sup> via zoom from 1pm-2:30pm. If you would like to be added to this subcommittee, you can reach out to [sokelley@uab.edu](mailto:sokelley@uab.edu) or you can sign up via AIACC webpage [AIACC Committee Involvement Request](#)

Michelle McDaniel provided the remainder of the report. Originally the survey was only going to run through this past December, however it was decided to extend this to ensure that it represented as much of the state as possible-there are some rural areas that they are hoping to gain input from. Also, the combined workgroup worked on a document that maps out the resources for childcare providers and training related to autism that's available to them. There are some grants that are being used to -PPEER (training and support provided to special educators). We are taking the work that has been done through early intervention where autism mentors (community mentors) were trained across the state-they are working to train early childhood special education teachers in three counties (Jackson, Jefferson, and Mobile) as a pilot. There is

another grant that Dr. Lea Yerby with UA and UCP of West Alabama has that takes this same model targeting community preschool providers (ages 3-5) who have ASD of suspected. Looking at ways that they can support service providers not just through training but also through a supported learning collaborative and some mentoring. We will be meeting again on February 9<sup>th</sup> at 10am. If you would like to be included, send an email to Michelle McDaniel at [memcdaniel@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:memcdaniel@health.southalabama.edu).

Ages 6-13 Subcommittee: Dr. Heather Jones-

Continued to meet monthly- focusing on sharing resources with each other and speaking on barriers specifically on school age and working with the state department of education, service providers, parents; sharing those resources, information about conferences, training, needs. Teachers still report that they may/may not feel equipped to work with this population. Next meeting is February 10<sup>th</sup> 1pm.

Ages 14-20 Subcommittee: Dr. Erich Grommet-

Worked on proposing policy on the behavioral services procedural guidelines which relate to autistic Alabamians receiving waivers through Medicaid. One thing that should be noted as it may affect providers, is that 2018 revision to these guidelines-if anyone is interested in the current guidelines, I will be happy to provide that to you. Highlighting some of the major points in the revision- Alabama behavior analysts licensing statute provides clear parameters as to who can provide behavior assessment, develop a treatment plan, supervising implementation, and providing ongoing clinical oversight of behavior analytic procedures. The current and the proposed behavior procedure guidelines however appear to predate the 2017 licensure law and at times aligned or assigned behavior analysis functions to bachelor level providers with minimal training. This creates a risk for unlicensed practice of behavior analysis-specifically where guidelines do require individuals without formal graduate supervised field work or oversight by the Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensure Board. It is strongly recommended that behavior support-provider categories have credentialing tiers that align with state law.

The second issue is that there are several sections of the guidelines that require behavior analysts and other nonmedical providers to evaluate psychotropic medications effectiveness- track psychiatric symptoms, and structure psychotropic medication plans. determine target symptoms for medications. These expectations in our view fall within medicine and not behavior analysis. Certainly, it is appropriate to urge coordination with prescribers and documentation of behavioral observations; but anything beyond that should really involve the Alabama State Board of Medical Examiners, the medical licensing commission, the medical association for the state of Alabama, and other relevant medical partners to ensure legal compliance of these standards. The way that these current guidelines are written could place behavior analysts and others in jeopardy of losing their licenses.

Third recommendation concerns the law that establishes annual behavior support services at 1200 units- 800 of which are capped at professional; this could be challenged under federal law. (37:46) We strongly recommend that ADMH devise a task force that involves developmental disabilities leadership, autism services leadership, the Alabama behavior analyst licensure board, the Alabama association for behavior analyst, Alabama board of examiners in psychology, Alabama psychological association, Alabama state board of medical examiners and medical licensure commission, medical association for the state of Alabama, and open public comment for all providers. Another point that has been worked on is seeking the Attorney General's input on whether the Alabama Behavioral Licensing Board is an independent board or if it is subordinate to Alabama Department of Mental Health. Although neither of these issues are specific to 14-20 subcommittee, they are very essential to service quality for many adolescents and other autistic Alabamians. According to the Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> AL.com article title, Alabama ranks at the bottom of the nation for mental health care. The 14-20 subcommittee will be looped in on these issues.

#### Adults / Ages 21+-

Subcommittee has not met this quarter. Previous meetings have focused on barriers to access-available and needed resources. Difficulty with conceptualizing goals as they were created in 2018- thinking if this is the time to now update some of the goals for the committees and revisit what the council's vision is for the committees. We spend a lot of time discussing what is not out there and we would like to move towards how we can address some of the things that are not available due to funding challenges. Dr. O'Kelley and Dr. Ryan will be giving a talk on Jan 30<sup>th</sup> at the Alabama Psychological Association midwinter conference on evidence-based diagnostic strategies across the lifespan.

#### Diagnostics and Health-

Been on a hold for a long time now- the way that this subcommittee operates in the current environment, we will have to rethink entirely. That relates to the structure that the AIACC in general and what the lead agency wants prioritized as far as diagnostics and health. The subcommittee has been somewhat difficult to steer for a variety of reasons- as it covers the entire lifespan. We want to make sure that we are expanding access, approaches to identification of autism across the lifespan- there are ways that coordination and collaboration can be improved. As health is such a broad topic, knowing how to best set our priorities for coordination/collaboration has been challenging. Some topics that have already been mentioned regarding health, health care, participation involving providers and Dr. Grommet mentioned how we steward the system to ensure that appropriate practices are being done by appropriate providers-making sure that scope of practice and competency are well defined is an important issue. It's been a difficult time trying to figure out how this subcommittee should exist and therefore we are leaning heavily on the coordinating council as a whole and would love to see

how we can reset the priorities. We are still trying to figure out how best we can organize understanding the broad insurance landscape – that may affect access to care on all levels. Hopefully there will be some dialogue to discuss priorities and goals and how we can steward the system for diagnostics and health care as it continues to develop.

## **Regional Autism Network**

Kristie Ford UAB-

Our five Alabama regional autism sites collectively served over 8,000 individuals statewide through direct assistance, technical consultation, professional training, and public education- specifically RAN staff provided information to 473 families seeking solutions, 136 professionals asking for assistance. Also provided training to 682 professionals regarding public awareness efforts reached over 7500 Alabamians. Families across our state benefitted from targeted support and system navigation while the professionals and educators participated in evidenced based trainings to help enhance their ability to serve individuals on the spectrum. We had seasonal events throughout the quarter to provide outreach, awareness, and different community partnerships.

Region 1 UAH: Poster presentation about RAN at the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Orlando, FL- over 6,000 individuals in attendance. Continues to manage statewide calendar events of the events that RAN is hosting. <https://ran.uah.edu/calendars/statewide-ran-calendar> They also hosted a seizure first aid certification course in November in partnership with the Epilepsy Foundation of Alabama. Hosted ADAP at an event in Scottsboro, AL to share information on special education, Medicaid, and Medicaid waivers.

Region 2 UA: Hosted ADOS-2 certification and Project Impact training in partnership with OTIDE to 47 professionals. They also participated in the Alabama ABA conference where they were able to connect RAN to over 300 BCBA's.

Region 3 USA: Partnered with ADAP to provide community workshops in Baldwin County. They also partnered with the USA college of education to provide professional training with elementary educators in Mobile County school system and co-hosted with UAH RAN a virtual presentation with Dr. Jordan Albright on developing social skills in the home. They also hosted disability resource fairs in Mobile and were able to connect to children's policy councils in Escambia and Monroe counties- and wanted to announce that they have launched a Facebook page.

Region 4 AU: Participated in the UCP EI conference alongside UAH. There were 168 attendees. They also attended a health fair in a catholic church; event at the Autauga public library, and they held their constituency board meeting. They maintain a very strong service, getting information out to families and professionals, not only in their region but across the state.

They also wanted to announce that Ms. Kim, their Korean community liaison, has left AU RAN and she will be missed.

Region 5 UAB: Hosted several workshops from early intervention in both English and Spanish. We also attended health fairs, children policy council meetings, and we are leading the statewide collaboration for the caregiver surveys, so it is housed at UAB RAN.

<https://ran.uah.edu/care-survey> As mentioned previously, we want to gain more data, especially in our rural areas about gaps in childcare, afterschool, and respite. Although it is geared towards the younger age groups, we do understand that there are gaps for care and services in the older young adult and adult population as well. We will also be attending the Alabama Autism Conference; all of us will be hosting quarterly constituency board meetings and different workshops.

I would also like to announce that RAN celebrates their 10-year anniversary. We have several events throughout this year. We are sharing some zoom information to gain input from families on how RAN has been helpful to them over the years. If you would like to partner with one of the RANs or not really sure who to contact visit <https://mh.alabama.gov/aiacc/regional-autism-network/>.

#### Funding and Finance-

Dr. Taylor- ABA Licensure Board new executive director starts next week, and the board is continuously working on getting licenses renewed.

Dr. Grommet- The previously mentioned concerns are also essential here: getting clarification on whether the Behavior Analyst Licensing Board is independent. Can decisions made by the board be vetoed by the ADMH commissioner? We are probably a few months away from the AG's office weighing in on that but hopefully we will get an answer on that soon.

Jake Schieber- No major updates for insurance. It's the start of the new year so many benefit changes -so we are in the process of getting those authorization switches to make sure that everyone is getting their treatment.

#### Member Updates-

Dr. O'Kelley UCED- They are sponsors for the Alabama Autism Conference. The preconference workshop is in the afternoon on February 26<sup>th</sup>, and the Conference is on Friday February 27<sup>th</sup>. In the previous council meeting, we were hoping that the preconference was going to focus on language, but we were unable to get the presenters that we wanted for that topic so now the preconference workshop is focused on transition from adolescent to adulthood with emphasis on

family involvement and preparation in addition to self-advocacy of the transitioning individual. We hope to see you all at the conference. If you have any questions, I am happy to assist.

Similarly, because one of our core functions is community education and information dissemination, we hold the annual Simpson-Ramsey Neurodevelopment Symposium which will be on April 30, 2026, in person only. <https://sites.uab.edu/cedd/events/annual-symposium/>

Another area of focus is technical assistance- one of our priorities has been on high quality diagnostics and access to those individuals across the lifespan. As Dr. Ryan mentioned we will be presenting at the Alabama Psychological Association midwinter conference this Friday, we are working with the CRS clinics. We have realized that we have a lot of providers in the state who are qualified, whose professional competencies and license allow for them to do diagnostics, but they are not doing it; so, we are trying to increase capacity through continuing education in that area. Our clinics are open for observations- if you would like to come and see you are more than welcome to do so. <https://sites.uab.edu/cedd/contact/>

Darryle Powell (Council on Developmental Disabilities) – Developed an emergency planning guide and we plan on doing some presentations on preparing for emergency disasters for people with developmental or intellectual disabilities. If anyone is interested, please reach out. We have electronic (that is fillable) as well as hard copy that is available. We are in the process of sending out RFPs but if you are not on the list but would like to be you can visit the website or send an email [Darryle.powell@mh.alabama.gov](mailto:Darryle.powell@mh.alabama.gov) and we will make sure that you are a part of that list to receive newsletters.

Stephanie Logan (director of the Behavior Health Services at Alabama Medicaid) – As of December 1<sup>st</sup> changes occurred regarding the ABA program; all providers start paying attention to our website. We do foresee a lot of changes coming up, so pay attention to your check-write and any banners with messages. Please stay tuned to that website as things will be changing in that program.

Mary Florian (Help Me Grow Alabama)- For last year, we served 3,053 children and autism concern was the highest among families: 594 with communication as a close second. 320 were confirmed with a diagnosis.

Dr. Grommet- Arc of Central Alabama (Crestwood location in Birmingham) is projected to begin diagnostic work in March 2026, although we are not yet fully credentialed, just want to place this on everyone's radar. When we get the go ahead, I do hope to send an email or a handout to this group so you will know where to send referrals.

Chenique Jeffress (Autism Support of Alabama)- We will be having a webinar this week about Autism Support of Alabama explaining what we do and our programs. We are a sponsor for the Autism conference in Alabama, and we will be hosting a social gathering that Thursday night (February 26<sup>th</sup>) for parents with childcare available. Also be on the lookout for our walks in April across the state.

Shelby DiPilla- Akilli's House adapted swimming in Jasper AL just educate families about water safety (this is free of charge). We hope to expand this and hope to offer it across the state.

Another program that Akilli's house offers is Century Trailers and a new century bus to make community events and fairs more adaptive to those who may have sensory needs. We are also working on a training for religious organizations regarding autism and how to support those who are participating in their programs.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1DScg19822/> [akillishouse@gmail.com](mailto:akillishouse@gmail.com)

#### General Announcements-

Arc of Madison County – PAAD clinic more than 7,000 referrals and completed over 3,200 assessments. We are seeing about a 60% autism diagnostic rate. Regarding a waitlist- ours is about 3 to 4 months and our partners across the state are even less than that. These are for ages 2-5. We are partnering with DHR to provide diagnostics for DHR children aged 2-11- Arc of Madison in Huntsville, Glenwood, and Goodwill Gulf Coast. Also partnering with DHR to help with home services to give those families more strategies so that they can remain in their current foster situations for as long as possible. Partnering with Madison city schools with that same home visitation program so we can help support what's going on in the home in the classroom as well. Our home visitation program is now being researched and published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders that will come out sometime this spring. We were also awarded an OpenAI grant 462,000 working with Auburn University to develop new technology with the goal of helping students with autism be able to join the workforce. We are also starting some statewide physician online trainings with our staff pediatrician going over autism, DSM checklist, and the PAAD clinic.

Motion to Adjourn by Chenique Jeffress.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: April 20<sup>th</sup>, at AIDT.