

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, April 20, 2026

Location:

400 Interstate Park Drive

Montgomery, AL 36109

Attendees: Dianna Tulliver proxy for Secretary Ami Brooks; American Academy of Pediatrics –Alabama Chapter (Justin Schwartz); UCEDD (Dr. O’Kelley); Elisabeth Newell proxy for Dr. Eric Mackey; Insurance representative (Jake Scheiber); ACDD (Darryle Powell); Autism Society of Alabama (Chenique Jeffress); Service Provider (Erich Grommet); UAB RAN (Kristie Ford); Wendi Glass for Dennis Gilliam; Robert Caldwell (Adult Services); Karen Smith proxy for Nancy Buckner (Commissioner DHR), proxy for Kim Boswell (Commissioner Alabama Department of Mental Health); Blair Bennet (Adult Services)

Guests: Tammy Barkey, Gwendolyn Brown, Mary Beth Vick, Darryle Powell, Audrey Bence, Mary Florian, Kristi Ford, Brandi Ellis, Olivia Ward, Rebecca Tisher, Lea Yerby, Mary Lorino, Kelsey Causey, Sam Kleman, Rebecca Tisher, Karen Smith, Megan Davis, Candance Cook, Paul Agostini, Casey Bailey, Michelle McDaniel, Doris Hill, Wendi Glass, Wendy Pittard, Michelle Creekmore, Sarah Olivas, Allison Battaglia, Martha Loulotka, Demetrius Price, Kortiti Pringle, Camry Courtland, Sarah Bailey, Kristi Krueger, Mashannan Starks, Brittany Marzette.

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 Johnson discussed therapy and how it aligns with our strategic priorities. She highlighted the importance of facilitating meetings and developing strategies that support the department’s infrastructure. The Complex Cases Work Group is being explored further, and discussions will continue. Please stay tuned for additional information.

We will continue to provide updates as they align with our strategic priorities. As we coordinate this work, we recognize that many mechanisms are involved. Our goal is to operate in a way that ensures we are meeting the needs of our families.

Motion was made to approve January Meeting Minutes.

State Coordinator Comments: Dr. Taylor stated that our Autism Services team conducted ICC training, and the goal of this training was to ensure that our ICCs provide cohesive, consistent services for families around the clock. Regarding constituent applications for members, we are currently waiting to receive the first batch from the governor, as she is responsible for scheduling those appointments. We are also holding additional applications for her so that the office is not overwhelmed with applications all at once.

New Business

Standards of Practice Reports:

Ages 0-5 Subcommittee: Dr. Sarah O'Kelley

Our committee is very large, with 92 people on the list. This is why we are working to break it down into smaller groups. It is challenging to gather such a large group, especially with members from so many different backgrounds. Our last subcommittee meeting was on February 19th. The next meeting was held on May 14, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. on Zoom. If you are not on our mailing list, you can sign up on the website. Regarding updates related to Early Intervention, that pilot has been paused. We are currently looking for someone at the state level to take on the coordination role. Mary Beth Vick previously managed this coordination before transitioning to a different path; however, this does not mean that children are not being seen out of early intervention, it's just that through that specific pilot it's on hold.

Michelle McDaniel- February 9th was our last meeting. Since that meeting we have told our groups to see who wants to stay in that group. In some other topics were discussed within that subcommittee for those who want to stay in that group. Our next meeting will be May 12th that hasn't gone out yet but will go out soon. But just to recap some of the things that we are working on that we are continuing to expand because this is such a large group with so many backgrounds, we have really taken advantage of the networking aspect of that and collaborating amongst our group numbers. A survey was conducted and launched through RAN that is looking at access for care across the state and we are continuing to gather responses from that- this will continue to go through April. The next time we meet we will have an update; we started looking at access to childcare for families in after school and summer care and maybe adding ways to capture needs of adult service as well. I will know at the end of April; we are trying to make sure we have enough respondents and representatives across. We also developed a resource list for childcare providers that I'm not sure if it's on the AIACC website we may have to get that added back on there. It's a document that we continue to add resources to but for childcare providers to contact us to get training there will be tools to share with them.

Also there have been some grants developed because of the networking at this large group and Mary Beth Vick was part of the Autism in Alabama initiative with Dr. Barbara has been influential in the work and is exploring how it can expand into other areas of childcare providers not just from birth to 3, but 3-5-year-olds. So, there was a grant that was received and used to facilitate both communities' autism mentors that were used within the (EI) advancing autism initiatives to provide training and learning collaboratives and that was done in January as part of a pilot project with Jackson, Jefferson and Mobile counties. Serving Pre-K teachers and those who were part of partnering principal programs there. Also, I do think there were some community providers that were included where there was space available too. There was also a grant that was provided by the Department Early childhood education that funded initiative Lunch made first. I meant to bring the flyer, but I forgot to bring it, but can get it to you in my emails. And this is one that is a collaboration between the University of Alabama with Dr. Yerby and Dr. Barbara and Mary Beth Vick with UCP of West Alabama access to early autism services in Alabama, strengthening community expertise that will go to the beginning of next year and it's going to provide an expansion of that autism initiative to look at training for childcare providers on that naturalistic developmental behavior interventions. If you don't have a diagnosis of autism for characteristics of autism, or communicational differences they are using the same thing to facilitate writing collaboratives to provide training. Those participants will be able to participate in ongoing follow-throughs to be able to provide some technical assistance and mentorship during coaching. Autism mentors have been asked to present at conferences throughout the state of Alabama I know they presented at the infant toddler conference and early Intervention conference and this summer they will also participate at the AALECA conference Gulf Coast this summer in June. There is also a new grant that has resulted from networking within our group learning collaboratives for childcare providers-strategies for supporting social communication... a (mouth) full but it's a grant that serves as a pilot program to serve 20 childcare providers in a variety of childcare settings. So, there has been training that's done with early intervention providers it's been done with some first class and part B principal providers, this is moving to the next step of putting it in the community amongst different settings whether it's a family homecare setting a license center exempt center, pretty much anyone that's working directly in a childcare compacity for those 3-5 year olds to be included in this so in this pilot 20 providers will be chosen by a selection committee to participate in at least ten of the learning classes that will be virtual. They will be provided with financial incentives to participate. Those applications were released on Friday and within 24 hours there were already 150 applicants, and it doesn't close until the 24th. I think it just shows the need that is there, and it also shows that we keep saying that our children don't have enough childcare and I think that the childcare industry wants to save the children, we will report on that again at our next update. We are also looking at where we are going with the work that we are doing one piece we forgot to report on is the caregiver support piece and that caregiver education piece so one of the things that we have done is created a document that is still in draft form but we are continuing to add to it similar to what we did for childcare providers. We did the focus on childcare and now we are focusing on caregivers, that's something that we are working on and need to get that out, but we are still adding to that. One of things we want to do is make sure we know what's already available before we start creating new things. So, we want to look at how we can take the model that we used to teach the strategies to childcare providers and how we can do that for daycare and caregivers to provide that in home settings and community settings and adding to that component of understanding just advocacy and understanding the systems that they are trying to navigate and the language at 3-5 year olds.

Chenique Jeffress -Thank you Sara and Michelle for that report.

Ages 6-13 Subcommittee: Dr. Heather Jones-

Continued to meet monthly- the focus of the group has been on collaborations by sharing resources and updates and statewide training to events to support family and service provider options. The group plans to review the previous work group's minutes and tasks to develop goals for the future work. She said that she would love, or we would love to collaborate with any other work group so lastly if you do want to join the work group or the subcommittee, we meet on the second Tuesday of the month at 1 pm via zoom so you can reach out to Dr. Hunter Jones or use the link on the AIACC webpage [AIACC Committee Involvement Request](#).

Ages 14-20 Subcommittee: Dr. Erich Grommet-

Licensing Board or now Alabama Behavior Analyst Advisory Council and I serve on that too. We should probably change that on our agenda to make sure we are using the new name since it is now governed by ADMH. We will be having a panel discussion that we are tentatively looking at 2027. Another thing that is a public forum Townhall for input on Medicaid's community waiver programs that's one of the ways that group homes and some of the other services is funded. For people with developmental disabilities, for which people in Alabama there are no autism specific waivers. The community waiver program forum is set for May 6th there is one from 9-10 and another from 1pm- 2pm on Webex. For this group some of the big issues if I was to feed you some talking points lets continue to push that residential autism waiver in Alabama but majority of the states in America have.

Adults / Ages 21+- Dr. Ryan

Dr. Ryan couldn't attend.

Diagnostics and Health: Dr. Justin Schwartz-

So, the diagnostic and health update is not one that is community based because their subcommittee has not met or existed in the last several months. Where diagnostic and health is concerned, is really to try and figure out how to focus on what we are doing regarding making sure kids and adults across the state are getting to the right type of evaluations for the needs that they have and the complexity that they have. I have been trying to figure out how to reorganize the diagnostic and health and subcommittee, specifically around that effort and honestly the amount of interest in and doing stuff in this regard probably is not congruent with the number of people who requested to be a part of the diagnostic health subcommittee through the website cause in the meetings that we have had in the past it has been hard to figure out how to maintain and engage people to be in support of this goal. So, to that end I think that by working closely with Dr. Taylor and others hopefully we can put out a new call for interest and a new call for engagement. Particularly as where we are faced with how to really help set up this tier system of evaluations for individuals who are suspected of having autism spectrum disorder. We want this to be an effort that has some collaboration and coordination around it; I say this a lot, it is that I will also need help doing this. My

bandwidth has been limited; I probably take a lot of responsibility of trying to have or not having formal meetings because the bandwidth that I have on my own is too stretched.

And so, to that end I want to reconvene a group that is really dedicated and wants to do more collaboration and organization and making sure that the people get to the evaluations that they are going to serve the needs in the right way. All that to say there has been a lot of other stuff that has been related to diagnostic health that has been going on, one thing that is kind of in the works is awaiting IRB approval at the moment here at UAB is a health care provider survey looking at prescribing practices of leucovorin for kids with Autism I think this is something that has been developing in many different ways over the past couple of months. So behavioral pediatrics and I are interested in getting a sense of what the community is doing in the health care space around leucovorin practices. For several reasons we want to make sure that we understand how people approach this issue by giving the state the science and how it is not reaching the level of evidence the breath of the practice just trying to get more information to see if that we can support more involvement in clinical trials. Stay tuned for that this may be something we may try to distribute through many channels. Once we have the survey up in running, another thing that may be of interest to the council's interest, especially in Diagnostic and Health, is how the medical marijuana issue is developing as many may know we are getting to a point in Alabama where health care providers can register to be prescribers for medical marijuana for a variety of different conditions. Autism is listed as one of the conditions and like on the surface it's kind of bizarre to have just Autism listed for which medical marijuana can be prescribed. What is it that we are doing medical marijuana for autism doesn't seem like its actual indication for any kind of treatment. But the prescriptions will be limited as far as I understand to adults, but people can ask to receive prescriptions as adults on behalf of a child. That also may have one of the conditions that are listed to be approved to be treated with medical marijuana so all that to say who knows how that will affect the demand for diagnostic evaluations on one hand. I think this will be important for us as a council and this may be again a focus area that we may need to figure out how to collaborate around how to navigate this. Especially, also the fact that the evidence for the use of any kind of medical marijuana for Autism is really limited without knowing what type of targets treatment may be going towards. All that to say these are a few issues that we may have to pay attention to.

Dr. Erich Grommet – This will probably lead to more people looking for diagnosis.

Justin Schwartz -That's what I was hinting at yes.

Dr. Erich Grommet-I am in the same boat and believe me more is known that is known is known and there may be some seed of truth of this being expanded upon. I am not familiar like you with any literature suggestions that marijuana treats core symptomology of autism. But if there is a work group for this I would be interested because I see multiple safety issues, but I guess one that I see every day is I see several adults everyday with mild intellectual disabilities who go out and get their hand on THC products and I guess seeing this as a vehicle for keeping them safe and out of the judicial system is helpful to me. Or maybe the other way I realize this is not the purpose and I know that it's not treatment, but it would allow for folks to legally purchase this product and stay out of jail.

Justin Schwartz- I think we will benefit from a wide coalition of folks representing different sectors including folks that have experience with autism everyone that is representing from young ages to adulthood will be important to be in on that input to make sure that we steer that appropriately. But as a treatment yes, the evidence is very limited because the targets are poorly defined and autism as a quote unquote medical

condition that is listed as something that needs treatment I think is probably not the best way to represent autism number one and two it is going to be threw out with lots of new drama with motivational unrelated to people with their motivation for asking for that.

Regional Autism Network

Michelle McDaniel-

We didn't have everybody's numbers compiled for this but most of the information for direct assistance in that's basically just general information or resources for themselves or a loved one's its over 500 people served , for technical assistance and consultation we served over 250, for professional training over 150 and then for community education and public outreach over 9,000 individuals – as far as statewide highlights we meet in February at the Alabama Autism conference in Tuscaloosa to hold the state wide constituency board so each RAN had constituency board members that attended to meet and discuss the successes and challenges related to their particular regions and identify some potential solutions and try to brain storm there also as I mentioned in my update with the work group grant still promoting the state side survey from access to care that will close at the end of April so the next meeting we should have some information to report on that we have over 700 responses to date right now and then regionally UH in Huntsville is working on the development of a custom GPT tool to create the ease of access of autism resources. If you were at the autism conference they did have a table set up where you can kind of test that out and play around with and they were able to take that feedback and make tweaks and adjustments to that and that's going to be a multiyear project. But really cool resource at USA we hosted monthly resource fairs for the last couple of years, we have changed that format now to host those quarterly and add a community workshop on with that and that was very successful so we will continue to do that also University of South Alabama(USA) -RAN was asked to serve on the city of Mobile advisory commission on disabilities we have been doing that for the last couple of months. At Auburn they were able to deliver school-based training and do some engagement with Faith based organizations in the community. Then UAB continues to host community education workshops and virtual opportunities which are great because everyone can share those and take advantage of that as well. As far as challenges that we have come across and issues that we hear from our different regions and communities are probably nothing new but families having on gone issues accessing autism diagnostic evaluations and specialist that provide that don't except Medicaid and seeing statewide shortages across therapy services so Occupational therapy, speech therapy, and then locating autism informed mental health providers has been a challenge. Caregiver support of course remains a significant need there are limited breast feed and summer care options available for the children and adult populations and family reporting challenges and frustrations with navigating special education systems and accessing frequent school-based supports. Rural areas are the greatest areas with limited provider availability they also increase travel, we hear that quite often. As far as upcoming events and activities happening across the state, I mentioned that we have a resource day and a community workshop at USA that will be in Mobile April 28th. UAB also has a couple of lunch and learn workshops coming up in April on the 22nd they have a virtual lunch and learn on guardianships and alternatives to guardianship and now April 28th they have safe screens & sound minds at Lineville Baptist Church. And then coming on in May, UA is still taking registration for project impact that will happen on campus for service providers and May 7th behavioral management strategies workshop will be hosting that USA RAN with our department of psychology and that will be in Selma May 18th UAB will be hosting a Medicaid waiver workshop at in Hunter hill Baptist Church and then on the 22nd they have another virtual lunch and learn for caregivers on

your wellness and inner strength And then in the future UAH is working on a conference which is to be announced, wait October 8th (speaking only) Huntsville the week of Fall break. Events that RAN is hosting can be seen on the calendar <https://ran.uah.edu/calendars/statewide-ran-calendar>.

Funding and Finance-

Dr. Grommet- Behavior Analyst Licensing - there is a lot of attendance at meetings that have been great. It's been related to some ethics, allocations, allegations- particularly down by the wire grass region. People are tuning in and that's good and I think the important thing to remember there is just that we drive authority through due processes and allegations are allegations and it takes time to go through things thoroughly and that's optimal to everybody's benefit. Let the disciplinary actions and going to find out whether they didn't have all the facts or whether they weren't done in an appropriate way. Rest assured that everything is being taken seriously. I think there are interactions with several here even about administrative issues. Please do continue to follow up if you are not getting your license or it has the wrong number on it. In some cases, I can probably get you what you need if needed more quickly but what I am really trying to push for is if the agencies are now providing to some level the administrative staff that they are supposed to be providing, but the next step is they have to do those jobs, they got to administer but I also don't want people to be without their licenses. Please continue to follow up on those things.

Public & Private Insurance Updates-

Jake Schieber-I don't have any updates for private Insurance

Member Updates-

Dr. O'Kelley UCED- Brief update

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 widely on developmental disabilities although at least two of our presentations are Autism related so Dr. Tomeny who will talking about siblings and then I am excited about the grand round speaker that who is Dr. John Constantino who is currently at Emory and he is a MD who has been involved in autism for as long as I have known world autism, and he is also an author Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS). He will be talking more about integrated mental health in pediatric settings.

General Announcements-

Darryle Powell (Council on Developmental Disabilities) – In regards Five-year state plan public comment opportunity. Alabama Association of Persons in Supporting Employment First AL-APSE 2026 is coming up July in Montgomery that's there the Alabama disability conference will be held in Auburn this year in September 13-15 that's there. And there are a lot of things that are going on I think one that was just mentioned was the Partners in Policymaking Alabama (PIPA) graduation which will be held in Prattville on May 1st and 2nd , the national federation of Blind of Alabama just had their convention so we supported

that we have Stronger together Family resource coming up in Opelika on Saturday so that's an opportunity for those in that area as well as the Sunshine Saturday that we held in Talladega on May 2nd. So that's just a little bit from us.

Dr. Grommet -Do you know about when folks who submitted for February ACDD grant might hear back.

Darryle Powell -It's on my table we had about seven proposals out of those seven it was only two that was approved in this recent proposal stack. So, I am going to be sending out emails and letters hopefully this week. I'm glad you mentioned that, Dr. Grommet. A couple of those projects were approved, and I believe Ms. Mary Beth with UCP of West Alabama is involved in one of them. The funding also supports collaborative work with childcare providers, as well as the Self-Advocates in Action project with Disability Rights and Resources of Birmingham.

Those were the only two that were approved this time. I am unsure when we are going to do another posting. The next proposal RAP probably won't be until fall and once we get approval from our feds to start our next state plan so we can see where we were with those goals that we as a council within the state has identified. So, it may be late fall before we post another RAP so I thought we would have more than seven that we received and would approve more than two that we approved but for those of us who know how the council operates you know we have a program planning committee who review all of those proposals and make recommendations to the full council and the full council determines who we will fund. The staffing does not have a say, so what proposals we fund because it's based on what the council member decides to approve so we kind of provide the TA and all that good stuff but as far as that approval process that's how that works. Hopefully we will get a good response on that next list of RFPS that we post I am not sure what it's going to look like because we will have to submit state planning to the feds for their approval I am not sure how quick we will get a response to approve or disapprove but that will determine the next RFP that we will post thank for the question Dr. Grommet.

Dr. Grommet- Can you say the titles of the two that were approved again?

Darryle Powell- The Learning Collaborative for childcare providers on strategies for caring for and teaching young children with social communication delays and characteristics of Autism and that's UCP OF West Alabama. And then we have self-Advocacy interaction with Disability and Rights out of Birmingham.

Chenique Jeffress (Autism Support of Alabama)- We will be having our last two walks of the month this weekend, one in Birmingham and one in Montgomery if you are interested, please come out. In May we will have our family grant opening for the month of May so have your families apply for that. It has gone up from \$250 dollars to \$400 per day so please get the word out about that. All our information will be up on our social media page and our websites.

Mary Florian (Help Me Grow Alabama)- Letting you know that half of our enrollments are referrals for autism whether it's helping the families get to evaluations or getting them the resources while they are waiting. Books, Balls and blocks coming up for our next meeting so we will have one at the Scottsboro WIC center on June 15th from 12-4pm. In Birmingham at the Five Points Library July 11th from 10-2pm. And then we have a tentative one for Mobile for July 17th I will get that information out when I know for

sure. And these are the ages and stages questionnaires that the parents fill out with activities for the families to do with the children from the ages of 1 month to 5½. I have flyers and I could get you those flyers as well if anyone's interested.

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Wendy Glass -we are coming to the end of the school year with our new Pre-K program for autism and the Deaf and Blind we have 16 students enrolled and that's 8 students per class. We are looking at opening a third class because we have an extensive waiting list, we are trying to filter in these kids from our early intervention system, so we are noticing that after early intervention that 3-5 gap we are losing them so if we can filter as many as we can in it seems to be promising that we are not going to lose them and follow them in to public schools. We will be transitioning five kids in the school year, and we will have our Busy BA, RBT and program specialist kind of follow them for maybe 6 to 8 weeks to get them settled in and pull out. So, we are excited about that first graduation and then for the little ones that are graduating that are not potty training we are looking at opening an intense potty-training clinic for 2 weeks. So, if in the Jordan Alabama area if there are some 4-5-year-old transitioning into kindergarten we will welcome them in as well. We are looking at expanding hopefully to a regional center this Fall, but I just don't know which regional center will probably be Mobile, Alorica, or Tuscaloosa. For the extensive potty training they like for them to be transitioned into kindergarten so it's really a transition project to make sure they are potty training the parents really must be involved in this clinic because it's the first two weeks of June so after we train, we will be handing it off to the parents.

General Announcements- None

Motion to Adjourn by Chenique Jeffress.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: July 20th, at AIDT.