



AMHB/ABADA Board Meeting Report **March 10-12, 2021**

Executive Summary

The Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) hold joint board meetings for the purpose of discussing behavioral health services and programs funded by the State of Alaska. The Boards are also tasked with evaluating federal and state laws concerning mental health, alcohol, and other drug and substance misuse prevention and treatment services (A.S. 47.30.661, A.S. 44.29.100). Throughout the meeting the Boards received updates from affiliated stakeholders and hosted public comment to gather personal testimony from providers and behavioral health consumers.

Planning and Announcement of the Meeting

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the boards met virtually on Zoom. The meeting was advertised on both the ABADA and AMHB websites, via online community calendars, online public notice, and a flyer was created to share via internal networks and with Alaska Behavioral Health Association members.

Schedule of Events

March 10	Legislative and Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) updates
March 11	Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) updates, public comment, and board business.
March 12	Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA) and Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention (OSMAP) updates and board business.

Governor Dunleavy Welcomes the Boards

Governor Mike Dunleavy opened the meeting with a welcome to board members and an update on the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor thanked the Boards for preventing substance abuse and supporting the frontline healthcare system, the court system, and working to develop long-term solutions to Alaska's mental health, emotional health, and substance misuse issues. He extended gratitude to board members with lived experience who are working to help others.

The Governor highlighted the success of the 1115 Medicaid waiver in its improvements in access to care in rural Alaska, and improved outcomes. Other efforts highlighted include increased coordination between high intensity drug trafficking areas and public health surveillance, the Alaska Medical Drug Utilization Review Program, and the youth-focused Marijuana Education Program.

Governor Dunleavy shared that 2020 has shown lower rates of crime and suicide than 2019, and additional research is underway to determine the cause. The goals for the state this year are to evaluate pandemic flexibilities and responses, and to continue with flexibilities in areas that have shown great success such as telehealth. As the State gets through the physical health impacts of the pandemic, the focus will shift to mental health and substance abuse issues that arose as a result.



What We Learned: Legislative Update

The Advocacy Coordinator for the Boards presented on bills and budget items relevant to both AMHB/ABADA and the other Trust Advisory Boards for the 2021 session. A final legislative report will be shared with Board members later this year.

Partner Update: Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)

The Boards received an update from Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) Director Gennifer Moreau-Johnson, DHSS Deputy Commissioner Al Wall, Deputy Commissioner Clinton Lasley and Deputy Director Heather Carpenter on Executive Order 119, which would reorganize the Department of Health and Social Services into two departments.

The proposed Department of Health would contain divisions of Public Assistance, Health Care Services, Behavioral Health, Senior and Disability Services and Public Health, which are viewed as primarily Medicaid administrative divisions. The proposed Department of Family and Community Services would contain the Office of Children's Services (OCS), Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), Juvenile Justice and Pioneer Homes, which are state-run 24/7 facilities and services. DHSS representatives stated that no services would be changed as a result of the reorganization and beneficiaries should see no impacts, as most of the changes would take place in the Division of Finance and Management Services. Each division will remain whole and functions will not be merged. Individual divisions are already working together through memorandums of understanding and nothing will change if DHSS were to move into two different departments.

The intention behind the split is to set the stage for a more focused conversation about how to solve problems and how to be proactive, as well as allow for more engagement with partners and advisory boards. The child welfare system in particular is in need of additional attention and resources, fully implement the Tribal Child Welfare Compact, reduce turnover and reduce state spending on workforce development. Other plans include opening a complex behavior neighborhood in the Anchorage Pioneer Home, opening the Chilkat unit at API by the second quarter of this year and operating API at full capacity by the end of the calendar year, as well as innovations in the Division of Juvenile Justice and other divisions.

DHSS representatives shared that this executive order came as the result of conversations that began almost immediately at the start of the Dunleavy administration in response to differences in mission sets and the drain on leadership across divisions. Leadership teams were assembled to identify the best possible remedies, however once the pandemic hit opportunities for stakeholder engagement disappeared and all efforts of the department went into pandemic response.

The Boards submitted written questions prior to the meeting regarding the impacts in the first year of reorganization, how the relationship with the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) will change, and anticipated changes to the organizational structure at the Division of Behavioral Health. The department does not anticipate any changes to funding or services in the first year, nor will there be changes in the ASO contract or in DBH staffing or structure. Deputy Director Carpenter reported that DBH is currently the oversight entity for Designated Evaluation Services (DES) and Designated Evaluation and Treatment (DET) programs and secure transport contracts, which would be transitioned into the Department of Family and Community Services once all new positions are trained. DHSS is working to upload responses that were provided to AMHB/ABADA as well as other stakeholder groups to the Department website.



Staff note: Executive Order 119 was withdrawn by the Governor for revisions on March 11, 2021.

Partner Update: Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (The Trust)

Budget Update

Trust CEO Mike Abbott presented on the status of recent Trustee appointments that are under legislative approval once again following the shortened 2020 legislative session. The appointments are part of a lawsuit between the legislature and the governor; however, they have been reappointed without dispute from the legislature.

CEO Abbott also provided background on the issue of the governor’s proposed budgets including appropriations from the Trust’s reserve accounts, a process that supplants the stakeholder engaged budgeting process and jeopardizes the Trust’s ability to serve beneficiaries in perpetuity, as well as contravenes the expectation that the Trust is responsible for independently managing their own resources. Approximately \$16 million of the proposed allocations in the state budget would utilize money in the Trust’s reserve account that Trustees did not support during its budgeting process. For the most part, the work that has been proposed by the governor is important for Trust beneficiaries, but it likely should be funded with other state funds instead of Trust resources. The Trust is working to educate legislators on this matter and provided letters sent to Finance Committee chairs that summarize the Trust’s arguments.

Crisis Now Update

Senior Program Officer Katie Baldwin-Johnson and Program Officer Eric Boyer presented an update on the Crisis Now model. The Trust is working with Agnew::Beck to implement the recommendations published in the 2019 RI International report and adding services to build the continuum of crisis response services. The Trust has convened teams with state agencies like the departments of Health and Social Services, Public Safety, Labor and Workforce Development, Corrections, and the Trust advisory boards, as well as Mat-Su Health Foundation to focus on oversight and feasibility, workforce, rural Alaska, legislation, and the statewide crisis call center.

FY 21 activities include community planning and needs assessment, operating planning/capital grants, crisis consultation expertise, beneficiary and consumer engagement, and Phase 1 activities like enhancing the crisis call volume capacity and launching mobile teams. Phase 2 will make 23-hour and short-term stabilization services available; Phase 3 will implement full ‘Care Traffic Control’ connectivity at the statewide call center as well as 23-hour crisis stabilization and short-term stabilization services.

Organizations in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Mat-Su are considering 23-hour stabilization centers and are forming community planning and steering committees. Anchorage will utilize \$1.5 million in alcohol tax funds for mobile crisis response start-up and operations within the Anchorage Fire Department, and Fairbanks providers are receiving grant funding to launch mobile crisis co-response. The team is reviewing what they are learning from the three communities to determine how to support some of these services in other regions as well. The Trust recently [published a series](#) in the Anchorage Daily News on the need for crisis continuum services and how the Crisis Now program can serve Alaskans.

Partner Update: Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA)

Chief Executive Officer Tom Chard presented an update from the Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA), an organization of approximately 73 mental health and drug and alcohol treatment providers. ABHA is tracking opportunities provided from COVID relief packages at the federal level and is tracking



multiple bills at the state level in coordination with the Boards, as well as Executive Order 119, the proposed split of the Department of Health and Social Services.

ABHA is working to identify their relationship with Optum Alaska, who has contracted with the State of Alaska to work as the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) to manage the behavioral system of care. Currently there is a concern that Optum has been contacting clients without provider involvement to offer other choices in treatment providers and resources, despite the therapeutic relationship developing between the provider and client up to that point. Optum is characterizing this as case management under their utilization management contract responsibility similar to what they do in other states. Optum does have some experience, expertise, and background in this, however ABHA would like the provider to be involved in the decision to reach out to the individual to ensure there isn't a breach in trust or in the therapeutic relationship. Optum continues to work with providers to resolve issues in the transition to the ASO, including implementation of the premium pay portal system, which providers will not need to pay for until the end of 2021. Some providers are experiencing issues with reimbursement due to specific diagnosis codes resulting in a significant backlog, and ABHA is working to set up meetings with Optum to resolve this.

Tom Chard shared that the State of Alaska is planning to phase out some of the Medicaid state plan services by the end of March 2021 to be replaced by 1115 waiver services that are being stood up. ABHA and providers are concerned about the fact that the authority to do children's residential treatment is all in the state plan, but providers haven't set up the 1115 services yet. ABHA is also tracking the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) and the role the governing board is playing in policy there, as well as the services available to youth that may be available only out of state. ABHA announced that the SHARP-III program has seen 55 applicants, 21 of which were behavioral health.

Board members shared a concern that data is not available on the effectiveness of programs when meeting with legislators year after year and asked if there was a method in which ABHA could approach their providers for data to share with the Boards and legislators. Tom Chard noted that part of the Board's statutory responsibility refers to monitoring and evaluating the system, for which data is needed. ABHA is working with the University of Alaska to figure out a way to do a process that other states call a *Behavioral Health Data Collaborative* to analyze and begin reporting on the data.

Partner Update: Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention (OSMAP)

Section Chief Theresa Welton introduced herself to the Boards and provided an update on the Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention (OSMAP), which was created in July of 2017 to focus on upstream and misuse prevention and harm reduction, and work with the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH), which concentrates on treatment and recovery. The major initiatives of OSMAP are prescriber/provider support; workforce, harm reduction and youth-focused initiatives; public health, behavioral health and emergency response integration; and the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) program.

OSMAP is working with DBH to take over a contract with TreatmentConnection.com, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and updates bed availability in real time and can facilitate referrals directly, and with the Office of Emergency Medical Services to establish a multi-disciplinary 'Linkage to Substance Use Disorder Care Committee'. OSMAP began the first review of the Overdose Death Review Committee in April 2020 and has reviewed 31 deaths thus far, is working the Health Analytics & Vital Records Section (HAVRS) on the Drug Overdose Mortality Report, and has designed a comprehensive marijuana use prevention, education, and treatment program in collaboration with DHSS.



OSMAP coordinates Project Hope, which has distributed over 9,000 Narcan kits in 2020, and over 41,000 since the program began in 2017, resulting in over three hundred reported overdose reversals. OSMAP has recently instituted a texting pilot program to provide more accurate data on when a reversal has taken place. The Legislature is currently considering *SB 70-Opioid Overdose Drugs*, which would remove the sunset date on the standing prescription for naloxone, which is used in Project Hope's Narcan kits. Section Chief Welton shared that opioid overdose death rates dropped in 2018 but started to increase in 2019 and continues to increase in preliminary data for 2020.

Public Comment

The boards heard live comments from four members of the public on the second day of meetings.

Comments from attendees included:

- An introduction to the Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance (AKEDA), which seeks to ease the burden of eating disorders and provide access to resources and support to help Alaskans address and overcome eating disorders. AKEDA offers a series of programs and resources to address eating disorders, including virtual support groups, body positive programs, conferences on dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and emotion-focused family therapy, and resources on their website, <https://www.akeatingdisordersalliance.org/>.
- Providers of Medicaid 1115 waiver services are beginning to transition to federal match reimbursement models but are still dependent on state grant funding during the transition time.
- The proposed outcomes from the DHSS split, including more structured or focused approach for and attention to the Department of Juvenile Justice, Office of Children's Services and Alaska Psychiatric Institute would be beneficial to youth and families.
- Ketchikan recently completed a community needs assessment that identified higher rates of poverty, suicide, binge drinking and illegal drug use than the national average, however Ketchikan reports lower rates of identified depression diagnoses. 70% of Ketchikan residents surveyed reported a need for a detox center.
- There is a lack of data on drug or alcohol related concerns in Valdez, and a lack of resources for those struggling with addiction, including a lack of therapeutic court, specific counseling, or Narcotics Anonymous program and the hospital is not equipped to deal with drug or alcohol emergencies.
- An overview of the Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative (PAARI) program, which works to train police officers in mental health and substance use issues and is active in a number of states.

Board Business

Bylaw Review and Approval

A bylaw revision committee was convened following the board meeting in Anchorage 2020, consisting of three members of AMHB, three members of ABADA, and staff and this subcommittee met regularly beginning in June 2020. An update on the revisions was provided during the October 2020 board meeting and the final draft along with a summary of the changes were mailed as part of the materials for this meeting. A detailed discussion about the proposed bylaw changes occurred at the AMHB/ABADA Executive Committee on February 24, 2021 where all Board members were invited to participate. Board members



discussed some of the proposed changes, including the removal of the requirement that AMHB chairs and ABADA officers cannot serve multiple consecutive terms. This change was explained as removing redundancies as it is customary for the vice-chair position to move into the chair position and that no chair could serve more than two consecutive terms because of the chair-elect, however members always can nominate another individual for the chair position at the annual October elections. A role call vote was taken with 14 in favor and 1 opposed. The motion passed and the new bylaws will take effect immediately.

Community Updates

Due to the inability of the Boards to gather face to face and have conversations about community activities and events, the chairs opened up a discussion for Board members to share about their communities. The summary is as follows:

Renee Schofield - Ketchikan

- Ketchikan is primarily a tourist town, and the lack of cruise ships has significantly impacted businesses. CARES Act money was accessed, but even so, many businesses continue to close down.
- With the lack of business comes an uptick of substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and domestic violence, which impacts adults and trickles down to the children.
- Community gardens with the Wellness Coalition and private individuals are starting up in response to rising rates of food insecurity in the community.
- The Wellness Coalition has stood up a teen youth center in the mall and has brought in a new adolescent psychologist providing services in the youth center that will eventually expand out into a larger group of people.
- The Wellness Coalition produced a needs assessment, and data has begun to be analyzed.

Sharon Clark - Nenana

- The Senior Center received a grant, and volunteers are delivering meals three days a week.
- It's been a particularly cold and snowy winter. There was an incident in February where the door at the water treatment plant failed and all the water froze. A collective effort from a variety of communities pulled together and got the water system back online. A new water plant is being built in Nenana, and the Native corporation is building a washeteria, which is much needed in this community.
- The Native corporation has graciously opened up their vaccination program to people that aren't members of the Native community. The Healy health center has started opening up theirs as well.

Cathy Bishop – Mat-Su Valley

- Set Free Alaska has run a quarantine house almost since COVID started as a place for people with substance use disorders to quarantine prior to going into other residential treatment facilities. Set Free has also recently opened a recovery residence for people coming out of other programs that need a place to live.
- The Department of Corrections has contracted for treatment within Goose Creek as well as for assessments and so forth to be done out of Mat-Su Pretrial. Much of that has been put on hold due to COVID, so those programs are waiting to open up.



- Mat-Su Health Foundation is a good place to get information about what is going on in the Mat-Su Valley. They have helped provide funding to agencies that are in need during COVID to help maintain their staffing. They also have links on their site where people can go to get vaccines.
- Telehealth opening up was a great asset for the Valley. Because the area is very spread out, it's a great alternative for people to not have to worry about transportation.

Brenda Moore - Anchorage

- Anchorage Senior Center has been offering meals for pick up at a reduced cost.
- Most entities are trying to offer resources to their constituencies virtually. Anchorage Youth Coalition has been doing a lot of things to support families and youth virtually.
- Beacon Hill is a ministry in Anchorage that takes children who would be at risk of going into the foster care system and places them with families through the church, and then the church supports those families.
- Children attending school virtually has added extra stress to a lot of families. When childcare wasn't available, that was another stressor. They will continue to see the fallout from the mental health consequences of COVID.
- Christian Health Associates has school-based health centers in Clark and Begich Middle School and Bartlett High School, and the executive director has been busy trying to get services stood up for students returning to class.
- Providers have scrambled to get resources available online, but it's always a challenge to know where to go to get the resources.

Lee Breinig - Anchorage

- As a provider within the tribal health care system, COVID has definitely affected the system and Anchorage and the surrounding area to a significant degree. It has really changed the way healthcare has been delivered, particularly with distance delivery.
- The Sullivan Arena has been identified as one of the largest homeless shelters in the nation. It speaks to how much of an impact COVID has had on the social service and behavioral health system and particularly the challenges that it presents to people who might be on either side of the digital divide.
- A bright spot may be that trips to emergency medical services have been funneled in a different way because of the COVID screening that is required. Emergency settings don't seem to have the same population accessing them as they did pre-COVID.

Duane Mayes – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

- Alaska Work Matters Task Force has been stood up as a joint effort of DHSS and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) that includes leadership from other departments and divisions, the Trust, and other stakeholders including the Boards. The Governor provided a letter of support to move forward with this task force, which will be time limited to one year with four meetings being held. The intent is that as the Governor is developing his plan of economic recovery, people with disabilities will be included in that plan from the beginning. The outcome is to develop a product that allows the State to do a better job with what they have in terms of employment



outcomes for Alaskans with disabilities, and that includes people who experience mental health and substance misuse issues.

Charlene Tautfest – Kenai/Soldotna

- Project Homeless Connect event was held in January, and instead of hosting it at the Sports Center, they did an in-reach into homeless camps. She reviewed the report as follows:
 - 109 individuals participated with household numbers of 229.
 - 62 percent reported it was their first time participating in the event.
 - 58 were male; 51 were female.
 - Disabling conditions reported by 83 of the participants:
 - 28 mental health
 - 2 developmental
 - 22 drug abuse
 - 26 chronic health conditions
 - 13 alcohol abuse
 - 19 Narcan kits were distributed
 - 77 percent found the event was helpful
 - 86 percent felt they were respected.
 - Community groups have been working to get a cold weather shelter on the Peninsula. Participants were asked if they would use it if it was available.
 - 91 said yes
 - 3 said no
 - 10 didn't answer
 - 47 owned a vehicle as their mode of transportation. The remainder walk or rely on family members.
 - Participants were asked: What is your priority need right now? Needs were:
 - Mental health
 - Housing
 - Trauma support
 - Recovery/drug rehab
 - Winter clothes
 - Hygiene items
 - Medical needs
 - Employment.

Tonie Protzman - Anchorage

- Receiving information from social workers that they can't get licensed or re-licensed. Social workers that graduated from college last still cannot sit for licensure, and they are getting no answers from the State licensing board at all. There will be another group of people graduating in May, and there has been no resolution to last year's graduates. There is a workforce shortage in Alaska, but providers can't get licensed. Audits are being sent out to licensed members though, so it's concerning that they can do one thing but not another.
- Hearing information from individuals who are receiving services from social workers about privacy concerns they have with telehealth. People don't know the settings that everyone in groups are located, so they don't know who is listening and overhearing things. People in rural Alaska can't receive services because they don't have internet, and telehealth is the only thing being offered. Telehealth therapy at home is also an issue because in rural Alaska, individuals may not have privacy to speak freely while they are in session in the home, and actually sharing information has led to domestic violence.



- There are no aftercare services in Anchorage for professionals who want to feel safe and want to make a living for their families and continue to give back to their communities.

Cathy Stone – Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)

- AHFC Rent Relief Program is up and running. It's \$200 million to go out to persons facing economic hardship due to COVID. 29,000 applications were received for 12 months of payments to go out directly to landlords. AHFC projects that there will not be a shortage of money for this program. They are working diligently with an increased short-term staff to get the applications processed and the funding sent out.
- When COVID hit, AHFC created a safety net related to the eviction moratoriums. The eviction moratorium ends at the end of March, but AHFC is hopeful that Congress or HUD will develop a solution.
- AHFC recently received 17 more VASH vouchers for homeless veterans, and they are now almost to 300.
- AHFC also received another 10 vouchers from DHSS for non-elderly persons with disabilities to combine with their Mainstream HUD program.
- AHFC received 15 vouchers for Making a Home, which is a youth homeless program they have been running with OCS.
- AHFC is trying to create some tax credit programs as well as permanent supportive housing. They also collaborated to add rental assistance. Bridgeway House in the Valley will be adding 24 units, and 7 of those will be 811, and the other 17 will be rental assistance for those people with disabilities who are homeless or near homeless.
- Covenant House is looking like they are going to expand their current footprint to add another 25 units at their facilities, and AHFC has committed to providing the rental assistance to that as well.
- Forget-Me-Not Manor expanded to 56 total units in Juneau.
- The American Rescue Plan that was just signed by President Biden will include emergency vouchers for the Public Housing Department. These will be dedicated to homeless; people who are at risk of homelessness; and people fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.
- The American Rescue Plan will also include \$50 million for mortgage assistance.
- Anchorage voucher waiting list will be opening from April 1st through the 30th for applications as a placeholder. A lottery will be held, and people will be informed of their place on the list, and if they are in the next group of 50 to be drawn for a voucher, AHFC will reach out to the individual for the details needed for their application.
- All AHFC locations have been closed to the public, but staff have been working continuously.

Dr. Enlow Walker - Fairbanks

- On a Members Advisory Committee for the Golden Valley Electric Company, and they have seen a lot of people having problems paying their electric bills this past year. No electricity was shut off for non-payment during the emergency, but that will start up again at some point soon. The committee was able to work with Golden Valley Electric to partially fund a fund being administered through Love INC to help people that are delinquent on their electric bills. Anybody who finds themselves in that position should contact Love INC.



- Fairbanks North Star Borough Health and Social Services Commission had funding to continue the match assistance grants and the human services community matching grants throughout the past year. Those funds have all been disbursed to the various organizations.
- The mayor has asked the Commission to evaluate and prioritize the applications for the Health Care Impact Grants from the CARES Act.

Report out on Legislative Visits

In lieu of in-person meetings with legislators, board members signed up to meet with bill sponsors for legislation the Boards are tracking in small groups via Zoom.

Representative Hopkins (D-Fairbanks) met with board members to discuss *HB 25-Social Emotional Learning in Public Schools*. Board members shared the work the Boards have done on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and social emotional learning as a practice to build resilience, including the learning portal developed by AMHB/ABADA/SSPC to educate the public on ACEs, suicide prevention, and the trauma-engaged school framework.

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson (D-Anchorage) heard personal stories from board members in relation to her bill *SB 2-Peace Officer De-escalation and Misconduct* and shared examples of trainings available to officers, like Mental Health First-Aid and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trainings.

Matt Davidson, legislative liaison for the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), met with board members regarding *HB 105-Detention of Minors*, a bill introduced on behalf of the governor and the Division. The Boards learned that the bill would bring DJJ into compliance with federal law and pertains to juvenile offenders who are auto-waived into the Department of Corrections, which is only offenders who are 16 or older at the time of their offense.

Follow Up Discussion Items

Board members are invited to review the Department's Reorganization website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/Commissioner/Pages/reorganization/overview.aspx> for an overview, resources and question and answers from stakeholder groups.

Following the presentation from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, board members asked if they could participate in Crisis Now community workgroups. Interested parties should contact Eric Boyer at eric.boyer@alaska.gov to be included in the listserv.

Board members asked what kind of programs OSMAP has regarding prevention for the senior population. The Boards have applied for supplemental Block Grant funding to work on a targeted prevention campaign on substance misuse for Alaska seniors. Proposed activities include project planning with stakeholder groups, targeted senior engagement and outreach, trainings for seniors and senior service providers on substance-misuse and harm reduction and purchasing and distributing drug disposal bags to older Alaskans.

The date and location of the next meeting was tabled to the meeting of the Executive Committee, which took place on March 24, 2021. The Executive Committee determined the next meeting would be conducted virtually on July 21, 2021 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. An in-person meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 2021.