



Summary Report of July 21, 2021 Virtual Board Meeting

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 promoting the effective coordination of Alaska's behavioral health services and programs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held virtually via Zoom. Throughout the meeting the boards received updates from affiliated organizations located across the state. The boards also hosted a public comment hearing to gather personal testimony from providers, administrators, and behavioral health consumers.

Planning and Announcement of the Meeting

This meeting is the first quarterly meeting since the Boards voted to update bylaws during the March 2021 meeting, which increased the number of annual meetings from two to four. The meeting was advertised via public notice, however the AMHB/ABADA websites are currently down due to the ongoing DHSS website cyberattack.

Schedule of Events

July 21 Board meeting with legislative session, Family Services Training Center, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, and Peer Support Certification updates.

Public Board Meetings

Board meetings were held via the Executive Director's Zoom account with a public link. Approximately 20 members of the community attended via Zoom or by calling in.

What We Learned: Legislative Update

The Advocacy Coordinator for the Boards presented on several bills and budget items relevant to both AMHB/ABADA and the other Trust Advisory Boards, including an update on bills that passed and budget inclusions and vetoes. A comprehensive joint advocacy report will be released in early August and will have a full accounting of each bill and budget item tracked during the 2021 session.

Partner Update: Alaska Training Cooperative, Family Services Training Center

The Boards received an update from Lisa Cauble and Tom McRoberts with the Family Services Training Center (FSTC), which is housed alongside the Alaska Training Cooperative at the University of Alaska-Anchorage Center for Human Development. The goal of the FSTC is to enhance the competency of behavioral health providers working with families to effect positive change and wellness for Alaskans. To achieve this goal, FSTC will provide training on evidence-based and promising family treatment models and foundational skills used to support and engage families.

The training center will provide opportunities to all communities across the state as well as ongoing quality assurance for each training program they support. FSTC is funded by the Alaska Department of Health and



Social Services-Division of Behavioral Health (DHSS-DBH) and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust). FSTC operates with a director, two behavioral health training coordinators, a research professional and an IS Ops Technician, and has an advisory committee with participation from both board members and board staff as well as other stakeholders. They have recently added trainings for new 1115 Medicaid Waiver Services, including home-based treatment services, therapeutic treatment home services, intensive case management services, and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services. A full catalog of upcoming trainings available can be found by visiting aktclms.org.

Partner Update: Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) Update

SSPC lead staff Eric Morrison and board chair Barb Franks provided an update on the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, including preliminary reporting on suicide rates for 2020, upcoming SSPC meetings, and the web of causality for understanding suicide prevention. SSPC has been working to update its 75-page “Alaska Suicide Postvention Guide: Preparing to Heal,” which is available online by emailing eric.morrison@alaska.gov. A video component to the guide is available on the [SSPC YouTube page](#), along with past trainings and public service announcements (PSAs). SSPC created radio and bilingual announcements, and plan to eventually produce PSAs in Alaska Native languages. SSPC continues to partner with the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) on the funding and implementation of the Suicide Awareness, Prevention and Postvention grantee program, which includes \$25,000 in small grants to eight school districts, split evenly between rural and urban areas across the state. SSPC is preparing to host a booth Alaska Federation of Natives conference and to conduct an awareness campaign for Suicide Prevention Month in September. SSPC’s State Plan, “Recasting the Net: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide in Alaska,” will expire in December 2022. Staff will begin working with stakeholders to update the plan beginning in late 2021 and will release the new plan in January 2023.

In 2020, the US Congress passed the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act establish 988 as the three-digit calling code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. SSPC, DBH and Alaska’s Careline crisis line staff have joined a national 988 Community of Practice, and SSPC staff and some members have joined an Alaska-specific 988 planning team for implementation in July 2022. Careline (877-266-HELP) is Alaska’s accredited National Suicide Prevention Lifeline call center and they are currently hiring new staff in anticipation of increased call volume when 988 is fully implemented.

Peer Support Certification Update

Behavioral Health Grant Program Manager Jim McLaughlin presented an update on Alaska’s peer support certification process. There has been concentrated attention to the credentials for all staff under the 1115 Medicaid Waiver for peer support services for both substance misuse and mental health, and the credential program has developed in the past four years thanks to assistance from the Trust and funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). A stakeholder group worked for approximately nine months to produce a set of recommendations for the peer support certification program, largely based on the SAMHSA core competencies for peer support workers. A contract went to the Alaska Commission for Behavioral Health Certification to be the certifying body, including a stipulation that there would be a certification advisory group that would be instrumental in developing the details of the certification. The Commission for Behavioral Health Certification has since chosen two new seats for commissioners from the peer support field.



There are multiple levels of certification, starting with an entry-level peer support associate, and graduating up with additional training and work experience. Training can be provided by any organization who produce curriculum that follows the approved framework and guidelines and receives approval from DBH, a process which allows organizations to train their own staff. The University of Alaska just submitted a curriculum for review as part of a six or eight-week course they are developing for peer support providers, in addition to their work on developing coursework to train peers in crisis services. DBH is also working on a training for peer supervisors and will have a contract for FY22 that will allow for additional training for peer supervisors.

Since the program launched in January 2021, there have been 44 applications for peer support certification and 26 individuals certified. DBH has been able to provide discounts for certification fees to prevent any barriers for people to get certified. DBH developed a Peer Support ECHO, a combination of a short didactic presentation with a subject matter expert in the field and feedback for a specific case scenario. There were six ECHO sessions in FY21 and will host an additional twelve sessions in FY22. It will be important to the future of the program to have ongoing direction from the steering group, as well as ongoing funding as Alaska continues to build.

Public Comment

The boards heard live comments from seven members of the public.

Comments from attendees included:

- A number of testifiers shared there is an ongoing provider shortage at the Alaska Behavioral Health Center Fairbanks office, with zero prescribing physicians or providers available. This is very detrimental to individuals on Medicaid and Medicare and has created wait times of several months, particularly if someone misses their initial appointment or is new to the community. This is causing a number of individuals to experience both relapse and recidivism, and is adding increased strain to drop-in services currently available.
- Fairbanks is rolling out their mobile crisis team in August 2021 and will be opening a residential treatment center soon.
- NAMI Fairbanks has recently hired their first executive director and rolled out a consumer support group called Connections, which has face-to-face meetings on the 2nd and 4th Mondays in the Northern Hope Center, which is a non-clinical drop-in center for mental health consumers.
- Providers in the state have had success utilizing technology in medically assisted treatment, including the Bridge device for opioid withdrawal, Soberlink for remote breath alcohol content monitoring, Emocha for remote observation of medication compliance, and reset and reset-O, which are the first FDA approved digital therapeutics for opioid and alcohol use disorder. The Bridge device is fitted by a trained medical provider and is worn for five days. 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 to pay for these devices, however those funds have all been disbursed to the various organizations.
- The DHSS website has been down due to a cyberattack which began in May 2021, which is causing a number of disruptions to programs and services. While some workarounds have been identified, notification of upcoming expiration of background clearances will not be sent to employers. Typically employers can verify the date of renewal by checking the State's website, however in lieu of this providers are encouraged to check internal personnel files for expiration dates and reach out to Michael



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ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE**

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White with the background check unit for expedited assistance. There is not a current allowance for lapsed licenses despite the increased difficulty in both renewing licenses for existing employees or in initiating clearance for new hires.

- JAMHI Health & Wellness in Juneau has begun to provide 1115 Medicaid Waiver services, and recently received funding from SAMHSA to become a certified community behavioral health clinic (CCBHC). JAMHI recently joined only one other Alaskan organization in becoming a federally qualified health center look alike, a designation that leverages funding from the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) to provide a comprehensive array of primary care services to anyone in the community who is in need of affordable health care. JAMHI is dedicated to expanding access to services throughout the community of Juneau, and more information can be found at JAMHIhealthandwellness.org.
- There is a shortage of providers in Fairbanks that is compounded by current providers leaving programs or the area, which effectively bumps existing patients to a waitlist and leads to gaps in service for up to a month for multiple patients. Crisis Now and other expansions in services are well needed, however without an increase in workforce, providers and emergency care will be overwhelmed.
- Parents in Ketchikan of children with multiple or complex diagnoses are unable to find care within the community and are unable to get approval for out-of-state care. In general, youth mental health services are difficult to access in Ketchikan and are leaving parents and children without options during very critical periods.

Follow Up Discussion Items

- A joint Legislative Advocacy Report will be released in early August.
- The Boards will work with partners to identify the impacts of budget vetoes on services for consumers and their families.
- Board elections will take place in the October meeting, along with committee assignments. Board members are encouraged to volunteer for the Advocacy Committee.
- The next meeting will take place October 12-14, 2021 in Sitka, AK. This will be a hybrid Zoom and in-person meeting at Centennial Hall. Staff will continue to monitor local guidelines and recommendations based on the recent spike in COVID-19 and will tentatively have travel plans finalized by mid-August after the Administrative Assistant position has been filled.