

Meeting Minutes: Behavioral Health Planning Council

Date: 02/02/2026
Minutes prepared by: Heather Ites
Meeting Location: Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
Elmer L. Andersen Building
540 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101
Room C2222

Attendance

- Present: Charlie Mishek, Anessa DeGroat, Sarah Costello-Fedje, Christen Donley, Marissa Lang, Heny Scere, Zamzam Ahmed, Ellie Skelton, Krysia Weidell, Ellie Miller, Tom Delaney, Mary Rogers, Aubrey Haddican, Kristine Preston, Kari Irber, Heather Ites, Keith Koegler, Johanna Hernandez, Diane Neal, Lauren Webber, Lori Thorpe, Tanya Carter

Agenda items and minutes

Welcome, Charlie Mishek, Chair

- Charlie Mishek provided a welcome and introduction.

Roll Call, Charlie Mishek, Chair

Charlie Mishek took the roll call and the following members were present:

- Charlie Mishek - Chair, Representing Parents/Guardians of a Child/Youth/Young Adult in Recovery from or at Risk of Substance Use Disorder
- Sarah Costello-Fedje– Representing Advocacy Organizations: Substance Use Disorder
- Anessa DeGroat – Representing Peer-Led Substance Use Recovery Community Organization (RCOs)
- Christen Donley- Family Member of an Adult in Recovery from or At-Risk of Substance Use Disorder #1
- Marissa Lang- Parents/Guardians of Child/Youth/Young adult in recovery from or at risk of SUD

- Henry Scere- Substance Use Disorder Provider
- Zamzam Ahmed- Youth/Young Adult with lived experience of Mental Health
- Krysia Weidell – Representing Family Members of an Adult with Lived Experience of Mental Health #1
- Ellie Skelton- Family Member of an Adult in Recovery from or At-Risk of Substance Use Disorder #2
- Lori Thorpe- State Economic Development Authority (DEED)
- Tanya Carter- State Health Authority
- Lauren Webber- State Criminal Justice Authority
- Ellie Miller- State Housing Authority
- Mary Rogers – Representing the Minnesota Office of Ombudsmen
- Aubrey Haddican – Representing the Minnesota State Child Welfare Authority
- Tom Delaney – Representing the Minnesota Department of Education

Introductions

The following non-members introduced themselves:

- Kari Irber – Minnesota Department of Human Services, BHA
- Kristine Preston – Minnesota Department of Human Services, BHA, Deputy Assistant Commissioner
- Heather Ites – Minnesota Department of Human Services, BH Planning Council Lead
- Keith Koegler – Minnesota Department of Human Services, BHA

The following non-members were also in attendance:

- Tim Pilcher- Minnesota Department of Human Services, BHA
- Johanna Hernandez – Minnesota Department of Human Services, BHA

Behavioral Health Administration Update

Presenter: Kristine Preston, Deputy Assistant Commissioner (presenting on behalf of Assistant Commissioner Theresa Steinmetz)

Key Updates and Context

- Assistant Commissioner Theresa Steinmetz was unable to attend; update provided on her behalf.
- Acknowledgement that 2026 has begun under extraordinarily difficult circumstances for DHS, BHA, and the State of Minnesota.

- Recognition that DHS, providers, and communities are navigating multiple complex and serious challenges simultaneously.

Community Impact and Public Safety

- Acknowledgement of the tragic shooting deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti and the profound impact on the community and state.
- Recognition that these events have deeply affected the public, providers, and DHS staff.

Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

- Emphasis that fraud must be prosecuted vigorously
- Acknowledgement that the overwhelming majority of providers operate with honesty, integrity, and provide critical services
- DHS is working diligently to strengthen program integrity controls and prevent misconduct without diminishing the work of compliant providers.

Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) Audit

- OLA audit of the Behavioral Health Administration and grant programs released the week of January 6, 2026.
- Audit identified the need to strengthen internal controls and grant management processes.
- DHS views the audit as a roadmap for process improvement, quality improvement, and continuous improvement.
- DHS accepts responsibility for the findings and is actively working to improve processes

Grant funding represents the primary mechanism for distributing SAMHSA funds, making improvements especially relevant to the Council.

- Noted that some process improvements were already underway during the audit period and were not fully reflected in the report
- Program integrity work has been ongoing for approximately 18 months and will continue to be intensified.

Provider Impact and Service Access

- Acknowledgement that program integrity efforts, particularly in Medicaid-funded and high-risk provider categories, have created challenges for providers
- DHS remains focused on ensuring individuals receive the right services, at the right time, from qualified providers.
- Commitment reaffirmed to balancing integrity, access, and service quality

Medicaid Provider Enrollment Moratorium

- Question raised regarding DHS memos announcing a temporary freeze on enrollment for certain high-risk provider types, including peer support services
- Clarification provided that:
 - The moratorium applies only to new enrollments; existing enrolled providers may continue operating.
 - The action is supported by DHS and recommended by CMS.
 - The moratorium is temporary (anticipated six months) and intended to allow time to strengthen program integrity controls.
 - Some provider categories are currently saturated, while others—particularly in rural areas—may have service gaps,
 - DHS may request exceptions to the moratorium where access gaps are demonstrated,

Review of Upcoming Year's Activities

Presented by: BHA Federal Grants Team

Substance Use and Mental Health Block Grant Updates

- All application revisions have been approved by SAMHSA project officers.
- First allotments for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026 have been received.
- PDF copies of submitted reports will be distributed to council members
- Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) data will remain partially incomplete until SAMHSA finalizes client-level reporting (anticipated July).
- Synar requirements have been completed and Minnesota remains in compliance.

Upcoming and Potential Presentations

Scheduled Presentation

- Minnesota Student Survey (2025 Results) – April Council Meeting

Proposed Topics for Future Meetings

- Pregnant Women and Women with Dependent Children (PWWDC) program overview
- Older adult mental health services and Medicare coverage issues

- State Opioid Response (SOR) and Opioid Epidemic Response Advisory Council (OERAC) grants
- Detailed review of block grant expenditures and funded projects
- Behavioral health data systems (DAANES and URS)
- Rural behavioral health service gaps and needs

Council members were invited to submit additional topic suggestions.

Council Engagement Discussion

Facilitated by: BHA Federal Grants Team

Key Themes

- Recognition that engagement varies by individual communication style and background
- Emphasis on fostering inclusive, accessible participation

Engagement Methods

- Chat participation
- Hand-raising
- Verbal discussion
- Follow-up communication between meetings

Discussion Highlights

- Members requested clearer orientation and examples of effective council participation for new members
 - Suggestions included highlighting prior council actions and providing structured onboarding opportunities
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Synar and Congratulate & Educate Program Presentation

Presenter: Collin Frazier, Supervisor Nicotine Point of Sale Prevention and Control

Program Overview

- Team of seven staff responsible for tobacco retail inspections

- Operates under Food and Drug Administration (FDA) contract (14th year)
- FDA inspection work fully reimbursed through federal funding

Inspection Summary (Cumulative)

- Approximately 4,200 licensed tobacco retailers statewide
- 57,711 FDA inspections conducted
 - 52,875: No violations
 - 3,905: Warning letters
 - 927: Civil money penalties
 - 4: No-sale orders

Synar Requirements and Compliance

- Annual random inspections to calculate Retailer Violation Rate (RVR)
- FFY 2026 sample: 372 establishments
- FFY 2027 sample: 483 establishments
- Inspections conducted October 1 – September 30
- Annual reporting to SAMHSA by December 31
- Minnesota's most recent RVR: **12.5%** (below the 20% federal threshold)

Congratulate and Educate Program

- Educational compliance checks conducted with law enforcement and public health agencies
 - Focus on education rather than enforcement
 - Retailers passing inspections receive compliance certificates
 - State Fiscal Year (SFY) participation included 65 agencies across 36 counties conducting 1,318 checks
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Federal Funding and Policy Update

Presenter: Tamir Elnabarawy, Director of Federal Relations

Administration / Republican Priorities

- Shared priorities in a letter to Speaker Johnson
- Key goals:
 - Reduce or maintain level discretionary funding
 - Eliminate programs described as having rampant fraud
 - Impose new punitive measures on states where fraud occurs
 - Remove earmarks
- These priorities could influence FY 2027 appropriations

Democratic Priorities (Senate Offices)

- Focus on health care affordability
- Messaging will include:
 - Expired ACA subsidies
 - Cuts to health care in reconciliation bills
- Democratic Steering and Policy Committee (led by Sen. Amy Klobuchar):
 - Will keep members updated on policy initiatives and messaging for the upcoming year

Reconciliation Bill Discussion

- Republicans discussed whether to pursue another reconciliation bill
- Speaker Johnson:
 - Open to one reconciliation bill per year during President Trump's term
 - Party is split on pursuing another bill
- Senate Majority Leader Thune:
 - Says reconciliation is possible if there is a clear, unifying purpose

- Potential unifying focus:
 - Further health care overhaul
- Concerns and opposition:
 - Most House committee chairs do not see another bill as feasible or politically wise before midterms
 - Moderate Republicans found the first reconciliation bill politically costly due to spending cuts

Potential Timeline if Reconciliation Moves Forward

- Budget resolution could be pursued this month:
 - Would signal how much funding cuts are planned to offset reconciliation
- If following last year's timeline:
 - House and Senate bills could move between Easter and Labor Day

Current Status / Clarifications

- No decision yet to pursue a second reconciliation bill
- Notable signal:
 - Some Republican factions are developing "wish lists," suggesting early movement toward a possible reconciliation 2.0.

Budget and Appropriations Timeline

- Continuing Resolution (CR) expired on the 31st of last month.
- Possible Health and Human Services (HHS) FY 2026 bill passage: as early as tomorrow
- President's FY 2027 budget request:
 - Expected by the end of the first week in February
- Budget resolutions may follow to set up reconciliation if pursued
- FY 2027 appropriations process:
 - Expected to begin in March

- Possible reconciliation floor action:
 - Could extend into summer and require conferencing

Closing

- Many specifics still unknown
- Overview intended to outline broad expectations for the coming months
- Presenter will return with updates as more details emerge on:
 - President's budget request
 - Appropriations bills
 - Any reconciliation legislation

Council Updates: Membership and Opening Seats, Heather Ites, Planning Council Coordinator

- Heather informed the Council that the Per Diem process has changed and that anyone with outstanding invoices should reach out to her.
- Please update contact information on Secretary of State website. All personal information is now protected and not open to the public.
- Review Panel members are in the process of reviewing applicants.

Closing and Adjourn

Charlie Mishek asked if there were additional questions, gave a brief closing statement, and ended the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: April 6th, 2026

Time: 1:00 PM

Location: Minnesota Department of Human Services, Elmer L. Andersen Building, 540 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101 Room C2222 and virtually via Teams