



Florida Behavioral Health Association

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Mental Health and Substance Use Providers Gather at The Capitol To Bring Awareness to Behavioral Health Needs

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Almost 200 leaders, clinicians, and families from across the state gathered Wednesday at the Florida Capitol for the annual Behavioral Health Day. Advocates met with legislators and state agencies to bring awareness to mental health and substance use disorder services in Florida.

The Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA) kicked off the day with a press conference at the Capitol. FBHA President and CEO Melanie Brown-Woofter was joined by Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Assistant Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Erica Floyd-Thomas, Agency for Healthcare Administration's (AHCA) Secretary Jason Weida, Representative Sam Garrison, Florida Association of Managing Entities (FAME) CEO Natalie Kelly, and NAMI Florida Executive Director Jarrod Strickland.

"FBHA is proud to represent over 70 not-for-profit, community mental health and substance use treatment providers throughout the entire state," said Brown-Woofter. "Our members are the safety nets in communities, who work tirelessly every day to serve Florida's most vulnerable populations.

Mental health and substance use providers are experiencing an influx of patients presenting for services at a higher rate than ever before," Brown-Woofter continued. "Alongside this increase in demand, we are also facing a competitive recruitment and retention landscape. To ensure the well-being of our families and our communities, we must continue to make an investment in mental health, substance use and prevention services."

"We have seen record investments made to support and increase behavioral health resources for children and families in our state," said DCF Secretary Shevaun Harris. "I am incredibly grateful for Governor DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis who have shown time and time again that they are committed to championing innovative and collaborative initiatives as well as reducing the stigma associated with seeking help from a behavioral health professional. All of

this progress and work would not be possible without the collaboration with mental health and substance use community providers throughout the state.”

“Every community provider, family member, and health care professional in Florida plays an important role in providing Florida residents and visitors with the highest level of care to promote resilience and positive mental health outcomes,” said AHCA Secretary Weida. “We are fortunate to have so many dedicated professionals serving the acute needs of individuals in their communities. The Agency looks forward to cross-agency collaboration to make sure we offer robust services to meet the emotional and physical health needs of Floridians.”

“Making sure that we provide the support and tools needed to address mental health and substance use disorders has always been something that is near and dear to my heart,” said Representative Sam Garrison, chair of the House Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee. “I am proud to work each and every day to try to make services more accessible to Floridians in need.”

"We're so grateful for Governor DeSantis', First Lady DeSantis', and the entire Legislature's continued prioritization of behavioral health services in Florida," said FAME CEO, Natalie Kelly. "With such dedication from our state's leadership, we've been able to deliver essential behavioral health services to those who need it most and may not otherwise be able to access these services."

The press conference wrapped up with Jarrod Strickland, NAMI Florida Executive Director, sharing his testimony about his lived experience battling mental health challenges.

“For the last 15 years, I have dedicated my life to connecting communities, supporting families, and empowering individuals in their mental health journeys,” said Strickland. “As a combat veteran, I have gained a unique perspective from my experiences with my own mental health conditions that have only allowed me to better inform my community and elevate the importance of mental health in every area of life.”

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The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. Its members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region.

For more information, please visit www.floridabha.org.