



Florida Behavioral Health Association

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The Florida Behavioral Health Association Recognizes Mental Health Awareness Month by Highlighting the Importance of Housing

St. Petersburg, Fla. – As we observe Mental Health Awareness Month, it is imperative to recognize the relationship between housing stability and mental well-being. The Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA) and its vast network of partners remain committed to emphasizing the importance of comprehensive mental health services.

“Across the state and the nation, it is incredibly difficult for families to afford a safe, secure home,” **said Melanie Brown-Woofter, President and CEO of the Florida Behavioral Health Association.** “This year for Mental Health Awareness Month, FBHA is shining a light on the importance of housing and its link to overall mental and physical well-being. Having a safe, reliable place to live is critical for individuals living with mental health or substance use disorders.”

According to the [Florida Housing Coalition](#), over 2.1 million low-income Florida households pay more than 30% of their incomes towards housing, with over half, 1.2 million low-income households, paying more than 50%. Further, there are over 27,000 individuals and families experiencing homelessness on any given night throughout the state.

Housing insecurity often leads to anxiety and depression and can result in more serious mental illnesses. The stress of not knowing where you are going to sleep at night or having to decide between purchasing food for your children or paying your rent are day-to-day stresses Floridians are facing each and every day. In addition, lack of housing typically contributes to a cascade of other health conditions, such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease. For individuals with serious mental illness, this cascade often further exacerbates their mental health condition and interferes with successful treatment.

On Thursday morning, FBHA hosted a press conference to highlight programs and services that provide wrap-around services to individuals with mental health and substance use disorders. Joining the event were the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Shevaun Harris, Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) Secretary Jason Weida, Community Assisted and Supportive Living (CASL) Chief Operations Officer PJ Brooks, and Boley Centers, Inc. (Boley) Chief Executive Officer Kevin Marrone, along with other FBHA members.

“Florida is fortunate to have leadership like Governor and First Lady DeSantis who recognize that mental health matters and therefore has focused on initiatives to elevate awareness and strategies to improve our system of care,” **said DCF Secretary Shevaun Harris.** “This month

and really all year long, we have an opportunity to promote the natural steps that people can do to support their overall well-being, and with our partners, we will continue working to ensure that every child and family has access to quality mental health services.”

“In Florida, we are very fortunate to have devoted professionals, engaged community partners, visionary state leaders, and innovative thinkers who provide solutions to the issues affecting our communities,” **said AHCA Secretary Jason Weida.** “We are grateful to have incredible partners such as the Florida Behavioral Health Association and all its community providers serving Medicaid recipients.”

“There are three pillars of support that help to ensure long-term housing stability for individuals who are chronically homeless and struggle with mental health and or substance use disorders,” **said CASL COO, PJ Brooks.** “Those three are good, quality housing, access to support services to include mental health, substance use treatment and medical services and access to rental assistance, often in the form of rent vouchers.”

Brooks continued, “Through these wrap-around services, including case management and peer support, we see individuals who have spent years on the street, begin to thrive in, for many, what is now their forever home. Housing truly is health care.”

The press conference wrapped up with **Kevin Marrone** sharing the success and tremendous impact his agency has had on the Pinellas County community through housing.

“It is critically important to work with community partners and stakeholders to create safe and affordable housing for vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and suffering from mental health and substance use disorders,” **said Marrone, President and CEO of Boley Centers, Inc.** “Together, we can truly make a difference on our community by providing supportive housing one person and one family at a time. Instead of taking a piecemeal approach to providing services, through affordable, safe, housing, we bring the services to the person in the housing of their choice.”

The press conference ended with Brown-Woofter offering words of hope and healing and statewide resources for individuals who may be struggling with mental health or housing insecurity. If you or someone you know is in crisis, dial 9-8-8. Hope Navigators, created by First Lady Casey DeSantis’ [HopeFlorida initiative](#), can help families and children get connected to behavioral health services.

FBHA represents nearly 70 community mental health and substance use treatment providers throughout the state. FBHA’s members span from Pensacola to Key West, serve over 600,000+ individuals each year, and provide services in every county in Florida. These community providers primarily serve the uninsured, underinsured, and the Medicaid populations. Visit [Floridabha.org](#) to find a list of community providers and get connected with mental health and substance use treatment as well as housing services.

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The [Florida Behavioral Health Association](#) (FBHA) 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 [Floridabha.org](#).

