



**Florida Behavioral  
Health Association**

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*Photo by Betsy Barfield Photography*

**Behavioral Health Day Focuses on Law Enforcement Partnerships**

*~More than one hundred Behavioral Health Partners in Tallahassee to Advocate and Educate~*

**Tallahassee, FL** – On Wednesday, leaders from Florida’s behavioral health community joined with state leaders and law enforcement professionals to reaffirm a critical message that collaboration saves lives. At a time when mental health and substance use challenges continue to impact communities across Florida, strong partnerships between behavioral health providers and public safety professionals are more important than ever.

“We are here today to recognize the essential role that prevention, partnership, and coordination play in keeping our communities safe, healthy, and thriving,” **said Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA) President and CEO Melanie Brown Woofter.** “Florida’s community behavioral health providers offer expertise in crisis intervention, care coordination, and compassionate support. When law enforcement, behavioral health professionals, policymakers, families, and advocates all work together, we create a safety net strong enough to catch people when they fall, and supportive enough to help them rise again.”

The collaboration between law enforcement and behavioral health agencies has grown significantly in recent years. From co-responder models, where clinicians accompany officers on mental health calls, to [Florida’s 24/7 Mobile Response Teams](#), these partnerships help to divert individuals from custody to care, de-escalate crises, and connect people to life-saving treatment and support.

Joining FBHA at the news conference were state leaders, including Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA) Secretary Shevaun Harris, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Taylor Hatch, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Commissioner Mark Glass, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Secretary Matt Walsh, and Florida Sheriffs Association (FSA) Executive Director Matt Dunagan.

Behavioral Health Day would not have been possible without Representative Traci Koster, who works tirelessly in Tallahassee to fight not only for the needs of her constituents but also for the overall well-being of all Floridians.

“I remain deeply committed to ensuring every Floridian has access to the support they need to thrive mentally, emotionally, and personally,” **said Representative Traci Koster, Chair of the Civil Justice & Claims Committee and Vice Chair of the Justice Budget Subcommittee.** “On Behavioral Health Day, we are reminded just how crucial the partnership is between community behavioral health providers and law enforcement. In my time in the House, I have had the unique opportunity to witness how the intersection of our civil justice system and behavioral health impacts lives across our state. That is why expanding access to mental health and substance use treatment remains one of my top priorities both here in Tallahassee and throughout my district.”

Leaders in attendance emphasized the growing need to support first responders and frontline workers who witness trauma daily.

“Just as we prioritize the safety and well-being of our communities, we must also prioritize the well-being of the men and women who protect them,” **said FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass.** “Providing our officers and first responders with the

resources and care they need is essential to sustaining a strong, healthy public safety workforce.”

Expanding access to wellness programs, behavioral health training, and evidence-based interventions like Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and Question, Persuade, Respond (QPR) suicide prevention training is key to ensuring public safety professionals can care for others while also caring for themselves.

"Our deputies face immense challenges every day, and their ability to serve the community starts with their own well-being," **said FSA Executive Director Matt Dunagan.** "By investing in proven behavioral health programs, we are not just supporting our deputies, but we are equipping them with the tools to de-escalate high-stress situations and respond effectively to people in crisis. This strengthens both the safety of law enforcement and the safety of the communities they protect."

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Secretary Matt Walsh expressed his commitment to behavioral health treatment, while emphasizing the importance of helping adolescents and youth get back on their feet.

"The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice is committed to providing high-quality mental health treatment services throughout our continuum of care," **said DJJ Secretary Matt Walsh.** "Delivering comprehensive treatment ensures youth receive the support they need to build brighter, more productive futures that strengthen families and create safer communities."

FBHA's 2025 Behavioral Health Day was made possible by collaboration with organizations, including:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Florida Association of Managing Entities
- Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce at the University of South Florida
- Floridians for Recovery
- Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition
- Florida Psychiatric Society
- Florida Recovery Friendly Workplace
- Mental Health Association of Central Florida
- NAMI Florida
- Net Institute – Center for Addiction and Recovery Education
- North Florida/South Georgia VA Health System

**Brown Woofert** closed out the news conference by saying, "Mental health and substance use disorders do not discriminate. They can affect anyone, regardless of

background, career, or family. But with the right treatment, support, and community, recovery is absolutely possible. Everyone deserves that chance to heal and thrive.”

Remember, help is always available. Call or text 988 for the [National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#), or reach out to one of [FBHA's community provider members](#) for localized support from trained mental health professionals. [Florida's Mobile Response Teams](#) also offer immediate emergency behavioral health care for those in crisis.

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*FBHA represents over 70 community mental health and substance use treatment providers throughout the state. FBHA's members span from Pensacola to Key West, serve over half a million 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](http://Floridabha.org) to find a list of community providers and get connected with mental health and substance use treatment, along with other services.*