

Mental Health Matters: A Better You, A Better ADMH

ADMH ALL STAFF CONFERENCE

2026



Schedule

9:00 a.m.

SELLERS AUDITORIUM

Welcome with Commissioner Kimberly Boswell & ADMH Board of Trustees Vice-Chair Donna Foster

9:40 a.m.

LACKEY

FMLA Should not be a Scary Thing

MOBILE

Health Insurance Plans for New and Active Employees

RAST A

Applying the ACTOR Framework in Public-Sector Systems

RAST B

Unlock the Power of AI

SELLERS AUDITORIUM

A History of the Treatment of Individuals with Mental Illnesses in Alabama

BREAK IN BETWEEN FROM 10:50-11:00

1:20 p.m.

LACKEY

Cultivating a Culture of Safety & Security at ADMH

MOBILE

Unlock the Power of AI

RANDALL WELCOME CENTER

Bryce Hospital Museum Tour (meet at Registration for bus)

RAST A

AlabamaRetire 457 Plan Overview

RAST B

Stress Management & Building Resilience

SELLERS AUDITORIUM

Trauma Treatment That Improves Outcomes

BREAK IN BETWEEN FROM 2:30-2:40

11:00 a.m.

LACKEY

Advanced Cisco WebEx Tactics

MOBILE

Traumatic Media Overload

RAST A

ADMH 101

RAST B

AlabamaRetire 457 Plan Overview

SELLERS AUDITORIUM

Stress Management & Building Resilience

LUNCH BREAK IN BETWEEN FROM 12:10-1:20

2:40 p.m.

LACKEY

FMLA Should not be a Scary Thing

MOBILE

ADMH 101

RAST A

Cultivating a Culture of Safety & Security at ADMH

RAST B

Traumatic Media Overload

SELLERS AUDITORIUM

Harnessing a Growth Mindset for Transforming the Workplace

WiFi information

Network name: UA-BryantConfCtr-Bryant Museum

Password: Thank!YouSaban17

Letter from the Commissioner

ADMH staff,

I am delighted to welcome you to the 2026 Alabama Department of Mental Health Staff Conference!

This year's theme – "Mental Health Matters: A Better You, A Better ADMH" – goes to the heart of our vision, mission and values and reflects our firm belief that our department is at its best when staff feels supported, empowered and appreciated.

I'm especially excited about the opportunity for us to learn and celebrate our successes together. And we have a good deal to celebrate! In the two years since our last collective gathering, ADMH has made significant progress in a number of areas:

- *Staffing for mental health care technicians at all three ADMH facilities is averaged over 80 percent*
- *Successfully completed all federal requirements to demonstrate compliance with the HCBS settings rule, work that has been ongoing since 2017* – This is monumental milestone in protecting funding for over 5,000 Alabama residents with ID/DD who are currently served in waiver services, and the Department and Division of Developmental Disabilities are proud of the years of hard work that led to this accomplishment
- *Surpassed a 90 percent answer rate for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline*
- *Celebrated the opening of a new Crisis Center in Dothan, along with an expansion of the existing center in Tuscaloosa*
- *Bryce re-opened the greenhouse to the public in March 2026 after a six-year hiatus.*
- *Marked the release of the Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee's Comprehensive Plan outlining goals to improve behavioral health care for Alabama veterans*
- *Expanded the number of ADMH-certified detox beds*
- *Hosted the inaugural Prevention Day, a special event at the State Capitol bringing together partners in substance use prevention*
- *Rolled out the Alabama Certification Automation Program (ACAP), a new electronic provider certification system that reduces errors, saves time and improves efficiency by streamlining the application process*



I'd like to offer my personal thanks to the conference planning committee for a job well done! They have assembled an outstanding lineup of experts to present on topics that are both pertinent and timely.

I'm happy you're here! May you leave with renewed sense of purpose, energy and enthusiasm and a deeper dedication to our mission to "serve, empower, support" Alabamians with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities and substance use disorders.

Kimberly G. Boswell

Kimberly G. Boswell, Commissioner

Training Sessions

Each session qualifies for the following CEUs unless otherwise noted:

Counseling – 1, Nursing – 1.2, Social Work – 1

See page 11 for more detail about earning CEUs

A History of the Treatment of Individuals with Mental Illnesses in Alabama

Presenter: Stephen Davis ADMH

CEUs not offered

Objectives:

- Participants will learn where we came from, where we are and where we are going.

ADMH 101

Presenters: Camille Cumuze, Kim Hammack, Beverly Johnson, and Brooke Phillips, ADMH

Objectives:

- Develop a greater understanding of the Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Understand the Office of Substance Use Treatment Services (OSUTS) Continuum of Care
- Identify program offerings within the ADMH Child & Family Services
- Identify the program offerings within ADMH MI Community Programs

Advanced Cisco WebEx Tactics

Presenter: Cindy Shrum, ADMH

CEUs not offered

Objectives:

- Identify and configure essential audio/video settings, including "Background Noise Removal" and "Virtual Backgrounds."
- Demonstrate how to share content effectively, specifically the difference between sharing a Screen vs. a specific Application.
- Utilize in-meeting engagement tools such as Reactions, Chat, and Raise Hand to participate without interrupting the flow.
- Locate and manage the Meeting Recording and Automated Transcript once the session concludes.

AlabamaRetire 457 Plan Overview

Presenters: Isaiah Hileman, Empower

CEUs not offered

Objectives:

- Getting to know Empower
- Your retirement income
- Benefits of saving through your plan
- Investing choices
- How to enroll

Applying the ACTOR Framework in Public-Sector Systems

Presenters: Jennifer Doty, MS, LMFT, ICADC, Gold Stars & Grace, LLC

Objectives:

- Define trauma-informed leadership as a systems-level management approach rather than a clinical intervention.
- Apply the ACTOR framework (Accuracy, Clarity, Tone, Organization, Relevance) to leadership decision-making under pressure.
- Translate SAMHSA's Six Principles into observable leadership behaviors that improve workforce culture and public trust.
- Identify practical, short-term strategies to stabilize teams while maintaining accountability and performance standards.

Cultivating a Culture of Safety & Security at ADMH

Presenter: Joe Rittner, ADMH

Nursing CEUs only

Objectives:

- Overview of physical Security
- Emergency Preparedness
- Incident reporting

FMLA Should Not Be a Scary Thing

Presenter: Brandy Sponsler, ADMH

CEUs not offered

Objectives:

- Improve understanding of responsibilities under FMLA of both the employee and Department
- Understanding of the both the FMLA law as well as the Paid Parental Leave Act

Training Sessions

Harnessing a Growth Mindset for Transforming the Workplace

Presenters: Dr. Heather S. Cole, PhD, RN, CHSE and Dr. Kacie Duncan, PhD, RN, CCRN, University of Alabama

Objectives:

- Define the principles of a growth mindset and explain their relevance to professional development and workplace well-being.
- Recognize how mindset influences resilience, communication, and team dynamics during times of challenge and change.
- Implement strategies that foster a culture of growth, psychological safety, and adaptability within workplace teams.
- Apply growth mindset techniques to enhance collaboration, problem-solving, and organizational resilience.

Insurance Benefits Session – Overview

Presenter: Kristen Henderson, State Employees Insurance Board

CEUs not offered

Objectives:

- Explain available benefit plans and coverage options
- Clarify employee and employer cost responsibilities
- Outline enrollment procedures and important deadlines
- Provide guidance on how to choose benefits based on individual needs
- Answer participant questions and address common concerns

Stress Management & Building Resilience

Presenter: Emily Lazenby Cason, LICSW, Cason Counseling and Consulting, LLC

Objectives:

- Identify the emotional, physical, and behavioral signs and symptoms of stress.
- Explain how chronic stress impacts mental health, workplace functioning, and overall well-being
- Develop practical strategies to build long-term resilience through mindset shifts, healthy habits, and intentional routines.

Trauma Treatment that Improves Outcomes

Presenter: Carolyn Pickett, LMSW, Gateway Family Solutions

Objectives:

- Describe how trauma and chronic stress affect brain development, emotional regulation, and behavior.
- Recognize key indicators of traumatic stress among children and families involved in public systems.
- Identify system-level and clinical strategies that move beyond awareness toward structured, healing-informed intervention.
- Explain how Trauma Systems Therapy operationalizes trauma science and improves outcomes within public behavioral health settings.

Traumatic Media Overload

Presenter: Tyesha Durr, ADMH

Objectives:

- Define traumatic media overload and explain how repeated exposure to distressing media content can impact mental and emotional well-being.
- Identify common psychological and physiological responses associated with media overexposure, including anxiety, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue.
- Recognize populations at higher risk for media-related distress and understand contributing vulnerability factors.
- Apply practical strategies to establish healthy media boundaries and promote resilience while staying informed.

Unlock the Power of AI

Presenter: Dr. Zynnica Zafra and Cynthia Shrum

Nursing & Social Work CEUs only

Objectives:

- Distinguish between “Automated AI” and “Assisted AI,” reframing the tool as a drafting assistant rather than a final-decision maker.
- Demonstrate the ability to construct a 3-part prompt (Role, Context, Task) to generate high-quality administrative drafts.
- Identify which types of data are safe for public AI (e.g., policy summaries, general outreach) versus prohibited data (e.g., PII, PHI, and specific clinical notes).
- Apply a “Human-in-the-Loop” workflow, using AI to generate the initial 80% of a draft while reserving the final 20% for expert clinical and ethical review. Explain how Trauma Systems Therapy operationalizes trauma science and improves outcomes within public behavioral health settings.

Conference Speakers



Emily Cason

Emily Lazenby Cason, LICSW, is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and founder of Cason Counseling and Consulting, LLC. With more than 15 years of experience in medical, hospice, behavioral health, and community settings, she provides individual and couples therapy and delivers trainings on stress management, resilience, and workplace well being. She also teaches graduate social work courses at National University and Western New Mexico University, equipping individuals and organizations with practical tools for emotional wellness.



Heather Cole

Dr. Heather S. Cole is the Assistant Dean of Simulation at the University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing. A certified healthcare simulation educator and nurse scientist, her work centers on growth mindset, resilience, and innovative learning strategies. She leads initiatives integrating psychological safety, competency-based learning, and AI enhanced simulation to strengthen healthcare teams. A national presenter and published scholar, she promotes evidence based approaches that support adaptability, well being, and readiness to practice.



Camille Cumuze

Camille Cumuze, M.S., is a Montgomery native with bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology from Auburn University and Auburn University Montgomery. Her early clinical work included research roles and experiential training with Head Start and the Mt. Meigs program. Before joining the Alabama Division of Developmental Disabilities, she spent 14 years in private practice focusing on evaluation and treatment planning. At ADMH Division of Developmental Disabilities, she has served as Psychological and Behavioral Evaluator, Director of Community Programs, and now Associate Commissioner.



Steve Davis

Steve Davis is a 50 year employee of Alabama DMH and has served as Departmental Historian since 2008. His previous roles include Assistant and Acting HR Director at Bryce Hospital, HR Director at Taylor Hardin, and Director of Public Relations, among others. He is active in multiple historical and mental health organizations and has received NAMI's 2009 Media Award and 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award. He was also featured in Tuscaloosa Magazine as one of the city's most intriguing individuals.



Jennifer Doty

Jennifer Doty, MS, LMFT, ICADC, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and clinical leader specializing in trauma informed systems, substance use treatment, and workforce resilience. She is the founder of Gold Stars & Grace, LLC, and Executive Director of Fire Within Therapy, Inc. With extensive public sector and community mental health experience, she integrates trauma theory, Motivational Interviewing, cognitive behavioral approaches, and leadership strategies. She is also an educator and consultant known for translating research into practical, actionable guidance.



Tyseha Durr

Tyesha Durr is a licensed professional counselor and the State Reflective Practice Coordinator for the Alabama Department of Mental Health. She specializes in relationship based, trauma informed care for infants, young children, and families. Trained in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and Child Parent Psychotherapy, she was among Alabama's first clinicians qualified to provide CPP. She holds the F5A Clinical Mentor Endorsement and provides reflective supervision and statewide training on trauma informed, relationship centered practice.

Conference Speakers



Kim Hammack

Kim Hammack, Director of Mental Illness Community Programs, has 32 years of experience serving individuals with mental health needs, including 24 years with ADMH. She oversees planning and program development for adults with serious mental illness, Medicaid liaison work, community service contracts, and coordination with families, providers, and state partners. She also develops and monitors the Mental Health Services Block Grant. Kim holds a master's degree in counseling and psychology from Troy University.



Isaiah Hileman

Isaiah Hileman is a Retirement Plan Advisor for Empower, providing on site and virtual enrollment support and Retirement Readiness Reviews for employees across 22 central Alabama counties. He joined Empower in 2023 and holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Phoenix. Isaiah maintains the FINRA Series 6 registration and holds Series 63 and 65 state securities licenses.



Brooke Phillips

Brooke Phillips holds a master's degree in Community Mental Health Counseling from UAB and is a Licensed Professional Counselor and National Certified Counselor. She has served as a Program Manager and Mental Health Specialist in ADMH's Office of Substance Use Treatment Services since 2019 and became Women's Services Coordinator in 2020. She oversees coordination and clinical monitoring of state funded substance use treatment services for women, pregnant and postpartum women, women with children, and other adult populations.



Kristen Henderson

Kristen Henderson, Benefit Advisor with the State Employees Insurance Board. Kristen has been with SEIB for 2 years as a benefit advisor.



Beverly Johnson

Beverly Johnson, Director of Child & Family Services, has 30 years of experience supporting children and families across behavioral health, military, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems. With 22 years at ADMH and prior work with a certified provider, she brings a strong service and policy perspective. She also studied prevention science and serves on CADCA's Coalition Advisory Committee, contributing to national efforts that strengthen community well being.



Carolyn Pickett

Carolyn Pickett, LMSW, is the Clinical Manager for Therapeutic Services at Gateway, a nonprofit serving Alabama children and families since 1891. With over a decade of experience supporting trauma impacted youth and families, she leads Gateway's Trauma Systems Therapy implementation, including program development, staff training, and cross system collaboration. Her work focuses on translating trauma science into practical, sustainable treatment, and she regularly trains professionals in behavioral health, child welfare, and education statewide.

Conference Speakers



Joe Rittner

Joe Rittner serves as the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for the Alabama Department of Mental Health's Office of Law Enforcement Services. He has 33 years of experience in law enforcement, including 20 years with ADMH, where he has worked as a Special Agent I and Special Agent III.



Cindy Shrum

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass but learning to dance in the rain—a lesson Cindy embraced growing up on a Tuscaloosa farm. Her path led from nursing school to discovering a talent for computers, earning degrees in Business Management, Computer Science, and later an MPA/MIS from Troy University. She found a passion for teaching while working at Bryce Hospital and later taught at Shelton State and UA. She now serves as Deputy CIO for the Alabama Department of Mental Health and still loves traveling, gardening, genealogy, antiquing—and dancing in the rain.



Sounds of Joy

The Sounds of Joy choir, founded in 1998, has been a beloved part of the West Alabama community for more than 27 years. Under Vickie Brown's direction since 2014, the choir has expanded its reach with weekly performances and appearances at events such as the Special Olympics and the Statehouse in Montgomery. Their joyful music is especially popular during the Christmas season, making them a cherished and enduring musical presence across the region.



Brandy Sponsler

Brandy Sponsler has 26 years of HR experience with the State of Alabama working at State Personnel, Alabama Forestry Commission and the Examiners of Public Accounts. She possesses MBA and a BS in Human Resources from Auburn University.



Zynnia Zafra

Dr. Zafra is the Clinical Director of the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center, a 96 bed geriatric psychiatric hospital within the Alabama Department of Mental Health. She has worked with ADMH since 1999, bringing extensive clinical leadership to the facility. In her spare time, Dr. Zafra enjoys playing golf, traveling, and cheering for Alabama football.



Supporters

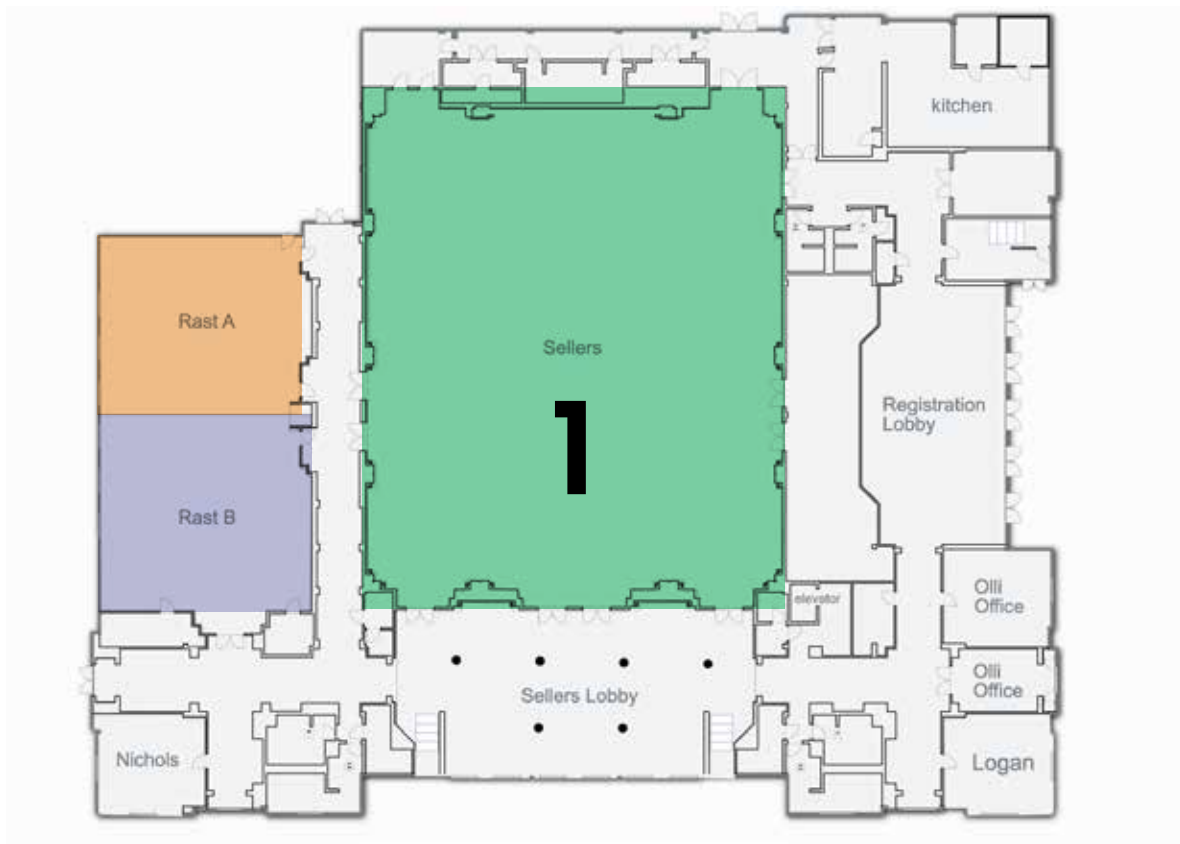


National Alliance on Mental Illness



Conference Information

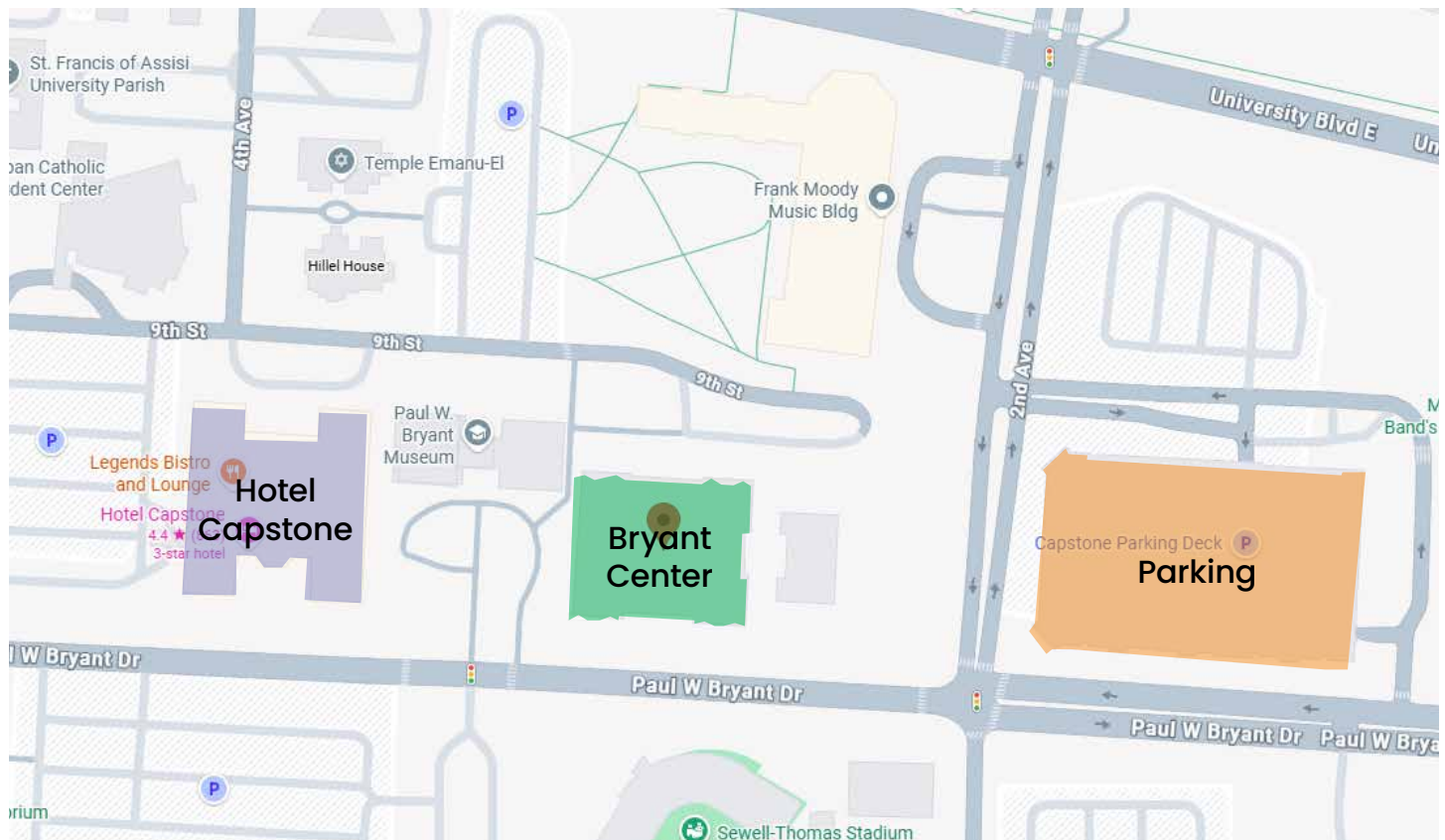
Bryant Conference Center Meeting Rooms



Conference Information

Parking

Parking is available in the Capstone parking deck located at 921 2nd Avenue.



Emergency/Special Assistance

ADMH staff are on hand for any special assistance. In the case of an emergency, please call 911.

Continuing Education Units (CEUs)

The Alabama Department of Mental Health is approved:

- as a provider of continuing education in Nursing by the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABNP0150 exp. 7/30/29).
- as a provider of continuing education in Social Work by the Alabama State Board of Social Workers (#0125 exp. 1/31/2028).
- by the Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling to sponsor and provide continuing education for Counselors.

You must be present for the entirety of the training sessions to receive contact hours. Evaluations will be required for each session.

Compliance with continuing education requirements is the responsibility of the licensee. The licensee should contact their regulatory board to determine course approval.

Contact hour verification will be provided via email for verified completion within 30 days of the training.

Please contact ADMH Staff Development if you have questions or concerns at staffdevelopment.dmh@mh.alabama.gov.



Alabama Department
of Mental Health
connecting mind and wellness