



agency for persons with disabilities  
*State of Florida*

# Dual Diagnosis: Serving Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Co- Occurring Mental Health Needs

PRESENTED BY:

**Rita Castor, MA, BCBA**

Regional Operations Manager

Southeast Region

**Ron DeSantis, Governor**

**Taylor Hatch, Director**

# Who Does APD Serve?

Individuals who have a developmental disability as defined in [Section 393.063\(11\), Florida Statutes](#) which occurs prior to age 18 and constitutes a substantial handicap that can reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely.

Disabilities served by APD include:

- Intellectual disabilities (Full Scale IQ of 70 or below)
- Severe forms of autism
- Spina bifida cystica or myelomeningocele
- Cerebral palsy
- Prader-Willi syndrome
- Down syndrome
- Phelan-McDermid syndrome and
- Individuals between the ages of 3-5 at high risk for a developmental disability.

# The Mobile Response Team Dual Diagnosis Pilot Project

- During FY 2024-25, the Florida Legislature provided APD with over 9.9 mil in funding to establish a pilot program in Orange, Broward, Hillsborough, and Leon counties



# The Goals of the Pilot Project

- To support training for front line team members to increase their expertise in serving dually diagnosed individuals
- To support and expand the existing MRT framework
  - Subject matter experts (SME) in both behavioral health and developmental disabilities will be added
  - Specifically, the SMEs will be Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) and Registered Behavior Techs (RBT)

# Overview

- APD, in partnership with DCF, is implementing a pilot program to expand existing MRTs by adding Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and Registered Behavior Techs who have experience supporting individuals with developmental disabilities.
- The goal is to reduce the number of crisis stabilization unit admissions, hospitalizations and incarcerations, and increase referrals to successful after-care supports.

# DCF Mobile Response Teams

- Per DCF, MRTs are meant to provide 24/7 emergency behavioral health care to anyone in the state of Florida.
- MRT team members include Licensed Mental Health Clinicians, Case Managers, Certified Peer Specialists, a Psychiatrist or Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, and Support Staff.
- MRT goals are to reduce trauma, prevent unnecessary psychiatric hospitalizations, and criminal justice involvement through de-escalation, appropriate crisis intervention, and connecting people to resources in their communities.

# Estimated Prevalence

- Of the individuals served by APD under the iBudget Waiver, over the past 3 years, an average of 1,900 individuals per year were hospitalized under a Baker Act.
- National trends indicate that up to 40% of individuals who are developmentally disabled also have mental health needs
- This indicates that over 14,000 individuals served by the iBudget Waiver could benefit from the outcomes of this pilot program

# A Historical Perspective

- In the mid to late 1900s the prevailing school of thought was that individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability could not also have a mental illness, which is inaccurate.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports adults with intellectual disability are over 4 times more likely to experience mental issues than those in the general population (Cree et al., 2020).



# System of Care Issues

- Obtaining treatment for co-occurring developmental disabilities and mental health conditions typically requires accessing care across two separate systems
- The lack of integrated care for individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health conditions has long been recognized
- Individuals who are dually diagnosed have complex needs that require collaboration across disciplines, providing an opportunity for intentional integrated care.

# Considerations: Prevention and Support

- According to data from DCF, calls requesting MRT support in Florida have increased by 73% from Fiscal Year 2019-2020.
- DCF also reports that Mobile Response Teams divert 82% of callers from hospitals or jails. In other words, 82% of the time, individuals can remain safely in their community-based environments without being transported to a facility.

# Proposed Solutions

- The MRT model and the MRT Dual Diagnosis Pilot Program are designed to delay or prevent Medicaid program expenditures for services in Crisis Stabilization Units, hospitals, or other institutional settings and promote the utilization of community-based interventions.
- The presence of a BCBA brings expertise in the areas of crisis de-escalation and diverting the individual away from placement in a Crisis Stabilization Unit.
- The BCBA also provides the opportunity to model and educate caregivers in how to identify triggers and implement coping strategies.

## Current Status: Training

- APD executed an agreement with the National Center for START Services to provide specialized training in the spring of 2024
- Four six-week training sessions have been provided to Waiver Support Coordinators and Direct Support Professionals
- Over 200 individuals have successfully completed the course

# Current Status: APD's Behavioral High Watch Program

- APD's Behavioral High Watch program will work with the MRTs to assure that clients are connected to appropriate follow up services
- The High Watch program will also provide additional review, monitoring, and oversight for individuals who are discharged from a Crisis Stabilization Unit

# Conclusion

- In accordance with the General Appropriations Act, this pilot establishes a strong foundation to improve supports and services for Floridians in this population
- The partnerships between APD, DCF, the MRTs, BCBAs, and local mental health partners and professionals will further support the goal of preventing unnecessary crisis stabilization unit admissions and increased utilization of community supports

Contact Information:

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

4030 Esplanade Way, Suite 380

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0950

Toll-Free: 1-866-APD-CARES (1-866-273-2273)

8 a.m. - 5 p.m. EST

Fax: (850) 922-6456

Email: [APD.info@apdcares.org](mailto:APD.info@apdcares.org)