



SunCoast Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration

January 28, 2026 | 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Goodwill Manasota Job Center-2705 51ST Ave E, Bradenton, FL 34203 - Hybrid

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance:

In-person: 14

Online: 42

Total: 56

Full Attendee List is Provided in Appendix A

Hosts/Facilitators:

Zoha Khan, Regional Collaboration Coordinator, SunCoast Region

Erinn Izykowski, Regional Operations Supervisor, SunCoast Region

Melissa Leslie, Suncoast Regional Operations Manager, SunCoast Region

Presenter:

Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce, College of Behavioral & Community Sciences, University of South Florida (USF)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Zoha Khan, Regional Collaboration Coordinator (RCC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) Program Office, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) called the SunCoast Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration (RBHIC) meeting to order at **1:01 p.m. EST on January 28, 2026.**

II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Zoha Khan RCC, SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF

- Welcomed participants
- Reviewed housekeeping items
- Introduced SAMH staff

Melissa Leslie, Regional Operations Manager (ROM), SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF

- Welcomed participants
- Introduced the Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce presenter



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III. PRESENTATION- Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce (FCBHW)

Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW, College of Behavioral & Community Sciences, USF

- FCBHW was legislatively established in July 2024 under Live Healthy Florida legislation.
- The Center’s mission is to grow, retain, and innovate Florida’s behavioral health workforce.
- FCBHW is housed at USF and serves the entire state of Florida.
- Core functions include research and data dissemination, education and professional development, policy analysis and implementation.
- As of 2024, Suncoast Region has 12,460 licensed behavioral health professionals, a 38% increase over 10 years.
- Regional population growth continues to outpace behavioral health workforce growth.
- Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) experienced approximately 60% per-capita growth over 10 years.
- Psychiatrists showed a net increase of only three providers over 10 years, reflecting a 14% per-capita decrease.
- Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (PMHNPs) are projected to experience significant growth and may meet demand by 2034.
- Rural workforce disparities persist, particularly for prescribers.
- FCBHW’s educational and professional development strategic imperatives will require collaboration across stakeholders and across the region to succeed.
- The FCBHW 2025 annual report and research briefs are not available on the FCBHW website.

Co-presenter - Emilie Ellenberg, Ph.D., Associate Director, FCBHW

- Career awareness and outreach efforts include engagement with school districts, career fairs, Area Health Education Centers (AHECs), the Florida College Access Network (FCAN), and the Xello career assessment platform.
- Education resources include career pathway tools on the FCBHW website, a learning-on-demand portal, and centralized workforce and education resources.



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- Strategic pathways include Behavioral Health Technician programs in technical high schools, expansion of 2+2-degree pathways, distance learning to support rural workforce development, and credit for prior learning.
- Mentorship pilot programs include the NextGen Program for undergraduate seniors and the upcoming NextUp Program for high school juniors and seniors.
- Financial support initiatives include emergency and completion funds, scholarships, thesis and dissertation awards, and the “Day One Job Prospects” initiative aligned with Florida Certification Board credentials.

FCBHW Presentation Questions:

1. **Jean Pierre, SunCoast Center** (Q&A in-person): Are providers required to use only the license on file, or the address associated with the licensee?
 - **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Workforce data is based on the provider’s primary practice location address.
2. **Jean Pierre, SunCoast Center** (Q&A in-person): Has there been any additional discussion about compact licensing?
 - **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Explained that Florida currently has an active interstate compact for psychologists. While the Counseling Compact has passed, it remains in the implementation phase and has not yet been fully activated due to legislative and administrative processes.
3. **Brena Slater, Chief Executive Officer of Safe Children Coalition** (Q&A in-person): The names of individuals included in the reported numbers are available and if that information is public?
 - **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Noted that all workforce data used is publicly available and can be accessed through the Florida Department of Health and associated public data systems, with data downloadable by profession.
4. **Lisa Baird, BH Strategy Lead, Humana** (Q&A via virtual chat): Any insight into when Florida will be live for the Counseling Compact?
 - **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Indicated that the Counseling Compact is actively in the implementation phase and noted that a national tracking resource is available to monitor the status and progress of interstate compacts. She reported that she would share this resource for reference.
5. **Aisha Mormon, LPCCS, Private Practice** (Q&A speaking via Teams virtually): Florida’s reimbursement and payment rates are not competitive with other states and noted that this may impact mental health providers and the availability of



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Goodwill Manasota Job Center-2705 51ST Ave E, Bradenton, FL 34203 - Hybrid services in Florida. She asked whether this contributes to fewer providers and services being offered in the state?

- **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Acknowledged that compensation is an important factor influencing workforce recruitment and retention. She explained that FCBHW has initiated a statewide compensation analysis led by a health economist, which will examine behavioral health pay in Florida relative to cost-of-living factors and other strategic priority career fields. Future phases of the analysis will include comparisons with other states.
6. **Sgt. Craig Brandon, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office** (Q&A speaking via Teams virtually): I supervise a co-responder program that is partnered with our local mental health provider. I'm under the impression that you have an annual report, which details different data points of mental health in the community and services provided and to what demographics. Does this sound familiar and if so, how can we view or get a copy and if you know what I am talking about?
- **Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Executive Director, FCBHW:** Reported that she was not immediately aware of the specific report referenced and committed to following up to provide additional information and connect with the individual as appropriate.

IV. REGIONAL SUCCESS STORIES

Erinn Izykowski, Regional Operations Supervisor (ROS), SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF

- Shared an impactful success story highlighting Peer Leader Pedro Nunez of Kimmy's Recovery Zone.
- Additional context was provided by Toni Fixico, Recovery-Oriented Quality Improvement Specialist (ROQIS).
- Mr. Nunez was recognized for his work with veterans, Spanish-language peer support, and Narcan training initiatives.
- Erinn reported success stories and impactful moments will be continued to be shared throughout the RBHC meetings, a call to action, to our participants is to provide success stories throughout the year via SCR email. This can be a provider, agency, peer, or even a client who's doing great work.

V. 2026 RBHC STRATEGY/SUB-COLLABORATIVES

Melissa Leslie, ROM, SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF
Erinn Izykowski, ROS, SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF



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- Melissa did an overview of the commission, the purpose of RBHIC and the sub-collaboratives.
- Erinn introduced the Suncoast Region Sub-Collaboratives:
 - *Are there any promising practices you've seen that could be scaled up or sustained within your area of work?*
 - *What concrete measures or indicators are you currently using, or could begin using, to track progress and success over time?*
- Erinn provided additional context on sub-collaborative participation and invited attendees to engage as subject matter experts. Supporting participants included Kerri Fisher, Central Florida Behavioral Health Network; Ashley Neal, Live Tampa Bay; Amanda Sciarrotta-Farell and Sergeant Dimundo, Pinellas County Sheriff Office (PSCO) Mental Health Unit.
- Ashley Neal, Amanda Sciarrotta-Farell, and Sergeant Dimundo shared perspectives related to sub-collaborative strategy and collaboration.
- Ashley Neal, Chief Outreach & Operating Officer Live Tampa Bay, highlighted collaborative initiatives addressing housing and transportation barriers, hospital bridge programs, public safety and behavioral health summits, and recovery ready workplaces.
- Amanda Sciarrotta-Farell, Crisis Response Specialist Clinical Supervisor, and Sergeant Dimundo, PCSO Mental Health Unit, discussed co-responder model operations, integration of licensed clinicians with deputies, improved Baker Act outcomes through enhanced collateral sharing, and importance of case management and follow up services.
- Melissa encouraged participants to connect in person with SunCoast SAMH staff or share contact information via chat for those interested in joining the sub-collaboratives or to share recommendations on other sub-collaborative ideas.
- Zoha reviewed the ongoing collaboration updates. Lunch and Learn series was described as supporting the quarterly RBHIC meetings, bringing together regional partners to discuss effective practices and opportunities to strengthen Florida's behavioral health system. Previous sessions included presentations by Dr. Jay Reeve and a statewide overview of the CORE Network. The next Lunch and Learn is scheduled for March 2026, with topic details and invitations to be shared once finalized.
- Participants were encouraged to share success stories highlighting peer leadership, provider impact, and regional collaboration. Engagement in working groups was promoted as a mechanism for sharing promising practices.



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- RCC went over the upcoming RBHIC meetings, April 28th, 2026, will be presented by CORE Network, July 22nd and October 29th, 2026, at the same time and location.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public comment
- Participant questions:

1. **Ashely Neal, Chief Outreach & Operating Officer, Live Tampa Bay** (Q&A in-person): I am wondering whether gaps in statute, including the Baker Act, limit our ability to connect individuals beyond involuntary examination to the full system of care, particularly recovery support services, once they begin accessing treatment.

- **Amanda Sciarrotta-Farell, Crisis Response Specialist Clinical Supervisor:** Responded that the Baker Act involves involuntary examination and does not allow forced treatment. She noted that step down or accountability processes following involuntary examination could be beneficial to support continuity of care. She referenced prior success with Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) programs, which provide ongoing monitoring, accountability, and opportunities for engagement while allowing individuals to re-enter care as needed.

2. **Eric Young, Program Administrator, Family Safety & Preservation** (Q&A in-person): Can you please share how frequent your team interacts with the elderly?

- **Amanda Sciarrotta-Farell, Crisis Response Specialist Clinical Supervisor:** Explained that teams frequently interact with elderly individuals, particularly those in memory care facilities or living alone without adequate support. While staff report concerns when neglect or safety risks are observed, many individuals are deemed competent and do not meet criteria for involuntary intervention, allowing them to refuse services. She noted that this creates ongoing challenges. To address these gaps, teams collaborate with law enforcement and actively engage family members, primary care providers, and neurologists to explore options such as power of attorney, increased oversight, or placement in supportive care settings to improve continuity of services.

VII. CLOSING REMARKS

Melissa Leslie, ROM, SCR SAMH Program Office, DCF

- Melissa thanked participants for their attendance and engagement and provided contact information for the SCR staff and the SCR SAMH mailbox.



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- Announced that the next RBHIC meeting for the SCR is scheduled for **April 28, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.**

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at **2:30 pm EST on January 28, 2026**, by Zoha Khan.



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APPENDIX A

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------|--|
| Alison | Fulford | Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) |
| Amanda | Bryan | Safe Children Coalition (SCC) |
| Amanda | Medina | Pasco County School District |
| Amanda | Sciarrotta-Farell* | Pinellas County Sheriff Office |
| Amy | Hood | Central Florida Behavioral Health Network Inc. |
| Arlene | Tracy* | Sarasota Sheriff Office |
| Asha | Mormon | LPCCS, Private Practice |
| Ashley | Neal* | Live Tampa Bay |
| Brena | Slater* | SCC |
| Brianna | Wolf | DJJ |
| Brittany | Merens | Department of Health (DOH) |
| Carole | Matyas* | Sunshine Health |
| Catarolyn | Glenn | Children's Network of Hillsborough |
| Celeste | Fernandez | DCF |
| Christie | Sparks | DOH |
| Christine | Didion | Area Agency on Aging- Pasco-Pinellas |
| Claudio | Dimundo* | Pinellas County Sheriff Office |
| Colleen | Thayer | NAMI Sarasota/Manatee |
| Craig | Brandon | Charlotte County Sheriff Office |
| David | Kuck* | Ibis Healthcare |
| Dawn | Clayton* | Sarasota County Public Schools |
| Derek | Mc Carron | Gracepoint |



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|---------------|------------|--|
| Donna | Sicilian | Pinellas County Public Schools |
| Doris | Nardelli* | Central Florida Behavioral Health Network Inc. |
| Eric | Young* | DCF |
| Harlee | James | DCF |
| Jarrett | Ballo | DJJ |
| Jean | Pierre* | SunCoast Center |
| Jennifer | Rodriguez* | DCF |
| Jesse | Kemper | Office of Children’s Behavioral Health Ombudsman |
| Jessica | Warnick | Aetna |
| Jim | Miller | Operation Par |
| Keniesha | Francis | DJJ |
| Laura | Carson* | DOH |
| Lisa | Baird | Humana |
| Lizette | Tabares* | Central Florida Behavioral Health Network Inc. |
| Lori | Brooks | Lee County Public Schools |
| Luke | Barnett | North Tampa Behavioral Health Hospital |
| Mariah | Nicholas | DOH |
| Melissa | Reid | DJJ |
| Michael | Kelleher | Hillsborough County Public Schools |
| Michelle Lynn | Hudson | Pasco County Public Schools |
| Molly | Beattie | Gracepoint |
| Nancy | Dauphinais | David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health |
| Nathan | Scott | DOH |
| Patrick | Heidemann | Disability Rights Florida |



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| Shaina | Joseph | Agency of Healthcare Administration |
| Sherry | Wenzel | Lee County School District |
| Tara | Bryant | Optum |
| Tara | Martinson | Lee County Human and Veteran Services |
| Tina | Jackson | Central Florida Behavioral Health Network Inc. |
| Tina | Neff-Legg | DCF |
| Tonya | Harrison | Office of Children's Behavioral Health Ombudsman |
| Valoria | Thomas | DCF |
| Willam | Bowden | Department of Corrections |
| Yuleisis | Mendez Travieso | Banyan Community Health |

* *Attended the meeting in person*