



Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

Taking the spirit and energy of Mental Health Awareness Month with us into the rest of the year, we have so much to celebrate and be grateful for. As you'll read below, our state is now home to THREE Crisis Stabilization Units for children and youth. These amazing facilities are beacons of hope for families in a crisis, and it is an incredible resource that our state has one in each Grand Division. Our work together to address the essential challenges of our day such as children's mental health, opioid addiction and overdose, and criminal justice solutions, will be our truly lasting legacy, and looking at the collaborative pathways we've created, we continue to see how the Volunteer State is leading the nation. I am so grateful for our community providers who take on challenge after challenge and respond with thoughtful and creative solutions to meet the need. And am deeply proud of our fellow state employees at the Regional Mental Health Institutes who respond with care, compassion, and skill for the patients they serve. Thank you for the role you play in this life-changing and life saving work.

[Read Governor Lee's 2026 Proclamation for Mental Health Awareness Month](#)

As we move toward the close of state fiscal year 2026, we are humbled and grateful to be able to share details of our FY27 budget with you. In a year when we were fully prepared for a flat budget, or even the possibility of cuts, **Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly have truly blessed our department with so many important and exciting appropriations totaling nearly \$59 million.** The funding amounts you see below will go to continue our mission of delivering resiliency, recovery, and independence to our Tennessee neighbors who need it most. These investments are the direct result of the life-changing outcomes and data you all produce on a daily basis. We truly are in the business of breaking cycles of addiction, mental illness, poverty, recidivism, and so much more for the people we serve— and the human impact of the services you provide makes it easy for our state lawmakers to see the return on their investment.

Budget Increases	Amount	Source	Description
School Based Behavioral Health Liaison Expansion	\$3,000,000	K-12 MH Trust Fund	Add contracted school-based behavioral health liaisons across the state.
Creating Homes Initiative 3.0 (NR)	\$5,000,000	F&A Opioid Abatement Fund	Expand the number of safe, affordable, and quality permanent housing opportunities for Tennesseans experiencing mental illness and/or substance use disorder.
Addiction Recovery Program - Year 3 of 4 (NR)	\$2,000,000	F&A Opioid Abatement Fund	Expand the Addiction Recovery Program, which includes services such as transitional housing, childcare, relapse prevention skills, transportation, and parent education.
Project Rural Recovery Expansion and Sustainability (NR)	\$3,740,000	F&A Opioid Abatement Fund	Integrated physical, mental health, and substance abuse care to individuals living in rural communities across TN by operating four mobile units.
TN Pathways Behavioral Health Scholarship Program (NR)	\$1,775,100	F&A Opioid Abatement Fund	TN Pathways Behavioral Health Scholarship Program, which will fund Tennessee students pursuing a master's degree in a behavioral health related field.
Shared Savings - Substance Use Disorder - Year 3 of 5 (NR)	\$2,000,000	TennCare Shared Savings	Funding for substance use disorder providers to increase capacity and access to a continuum of treatment and recovery services.
Shared Savings - Community MH Center Workforce Development - Year 3 of 5 (NR)	\$1,000,000	TennCare Shared Savings	Support of licensed behavioral health professionals supervising individuals seeking clinical licensure in a behavioral health profession.
Tennessee Sports Gambling Fund (NR)	\$5,171,300	TN Sports Gaming Fund	Grants to develop and establish treatment programs and resources for gambling addiction and compulsive gambling, pursuant to TCA 4-
K-12 MH Trust Fund Grants (NR)	\$4,000,000	K-12 MH Trust Fund	Community grants to enhance behavioral treatment in schools. Grants for infrastructure support for mental health programming in schools, specifically benefiting children and youth in grades K-12 across Tennessee.
Opioid Abatement Council Amendment to TCA § 33-11-103	\$3,500,000 Est. Actual Amount TBD	Opioid Abatement Council Funds	Beginning July 1, 2026, after required county distributions are made, ten percent of the remaining opioid abatement funds must be allocated to the TDMHSAS and deposited into a separate account within the opioid abatement fund.
Opioid Abatement Council Amendment to TCA § 33-11-103 (NR)	\$25,000,000	Opioid Abatement Council Funds	Funding for crisis, residential, and inpatient treatment services for uninsured individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Funds must be used to expand access, capacity, and stabilization services for such population.
TDMHSAS Budget	\$56,186,400		
Directed Appropriations	Amount	Source	Description
The Next Door Grant (NR)	\$500,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to The Next Door to assist women with substance use and co-occurring disorders.
The Jason Foundation Grant (NR)	\$500,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to The Jason Foundation, which provides educational and awareness programs related to youth
Families Free Grant (NR)	\$250,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to Families Free, which provides treatment, education, and intervention services to families.
21st Judicial District Recovery Court Grant (NR)	\$400,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to 21st Judicial District Recovery Court.
Northeast TN Regional Recovery Center Grant (NR)	\$500,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to Northeast TN Regional Recovery Center.
Macon County Recovery Court Grant	\$100,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to support and enhance programs, services, and operation of the recovery court.
Families Free Grant (NR)	\$250,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant to Families Free, to be used to provide support to recovery court programs and services at the Northeast TN Regional Recovery Center for men located in Roan Mountain and women located in Johnson City.
Helen Ross McNabb - East TN Military Services (NR)	\$300,000	State	Directed Pass Through Grant for outpatient mental health services directed toward military service members, veterans, and their
Total Directed Appropriations	\$2,800,000		
TOTAL Community MH and SA Increases for FY2027			\$58,986,400

I want to personally express gratitude to Krysten Velloff and Angela Jackson— our amazing policy duo who represent us so well. Thanks to their efforts and many other contributors in the Division of Planning, Policy, and Legislation, and the wider department team, TDMHSAS is able to offer timely, insightful,

relevant facts and data, virtually on demand, during the legislative session. This means that the voices of the Tennesseans we are blessed to serve are represented to the highest and best ability when critical decisions are being made. Thank you to everyone for making this General Assembly such a productive one.

May your work continue to be blessed,

Marie

MONTHLY Happenings

New Children and Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit Opens in Memphis



Congratulations to the team at Alliance Health Services in Memphis on cutting the ribbon for their new Children and Youth Crisis Services Center on May 12. The center is scheduled to begin accepting admissions on June 1, completing Tennessee's plan to have a children and youth Crisis Stabilization Unit in each grand division of the state.

With centers now in Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis, families supporting a youth or young adult through a psychiatric emergency have a place to turn for immediate help outside of a hospital emergency department. Data and outcomes from the initial pilot project through McNabb Center in Knoxville and the Nashville center operated by Mental Health Cooperative show a clear need for this service. In this fiscal year alone, nearly 1,000 Tennessee families have received crisis care through these facilities.

Learn more about Tennessee's full network of crisis services at <https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/crisis>.

Partnership, Progress, and Pathways to Recovery and Wellness



From left to right: Deputy Commissioner Matt Yancey, Commissioner Marie Williams, Jessica Youngbloom, Caitlin Wright, Mary Linden Salter, Alysia Smith Knight

Tennessee's story of collaboratively working to address the essential issue of public behavioral health workforce was in full display at #NatCon26. It's been 5 years since we came together with our partners at TAMHO, TAADAS, TennCare, advocacy and consumer groups, and higher education to proactively address the shortage of mental health professionals and substance use counselors. The roadmap from that workgroup led to successive landmark investments in **provider rates**, recruitment and retention **bonuses**, a **scholarship program**, and more. The partnership on display (plus a lot of support from the Governor and General Assembly) is what made it all possible. We're so grateful for partners willing to come to the table, bring their best ideas, and work to the common benefit of the people we are blessed to serve.

Congratulations to TAMHO Executive Director **Alysia Smith Knight** on her election to the **National Council for Mental Wellbeing Board of Directors**. Alysia will serve a three year term as a 100% Association Executive At-Large Representative starting July 1.

Scholarship Spotlight: Tamika Sargent

As mentioned above, the **TN Pathways Behavioral Health Scholarship Program** is one of the signature investments to come out of the Public Behavioral Health Workforce Workgroup. To date, the program has awarded scholarships to **425 students** with **100 already graduated** (even more with graduation in the recent days!) and **67 already working** at community behavioral health providers across the state. The program started in 2023 with an initial investment of \$3 million in state funds. Total investments by Governor Lee, the Tennessee General Assembly, and the TN Opioid Abatement Council have brought the investment in the public behavioral health workforce to \$10.3M with \$3.5M more funding coming in the future from state appropriations and the Rural Health Transformation Program. Learn more at <https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/scholarship>



One of the more than 400 scholarship recipients is **Tamika Sargent!** Tamika lives in Memphis where she serves as a Family Service Worker with Youth Villages supporting youth and families involved in the child welfare system. She also works as a Crisis Hotline Specialist with Alliance Healthcare Services, providing immediate support to individuals experiencing mental health crises.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tamika made the decision to return to school at Walden University to pursue a degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. While she successfully completed her academic coursework, challenges with securing internship placement delayed the completion of her degree. At one point, she considered stepping away from her educational goals altogether. Encouraged by a friend, Tamika chose to take a leap of faith and re-enroll in graduate school, this time pursuing a degree in Forensic Psychology. She began classes without a clear plan for how she would finance her education. Shortly after, she learned about the Tennessee Behavioral Health Pathways Scholarship through a supervisor. Although she initially believed she had missed the application deadline, she applied anyway—and was thrilled to be selected as a scholarship recipient.

The scholarship has provided Tamika with the financial support needed to focus fully on her studies, removing a significant barrier and allowing her to move forward with confidence and purpose. In addition to her professional and academic pursuits, Tamika is also an author and creative voice in the mental health space. Looking ahead, Tamika plans to work in the re-entry field, focusing on the intersection of mental health and recidivism. She is also developing a vision for her own re-entry program—one that combines therapeutic support with hands-on gardening experiences to promote healing, accountability, and long-term success.

Tamika describes this season of her life as both humbling and transformative. As she continues her journey, she remains committed to using her experiences to uplift others and create meaningful change in her community: **“I’ve learned that even when things don’t go the way you planned, it doesn’t mean the purpose is lost. Sometimes you have to pause, reset, and trust that growth is still happening. You can always bloom anyway.”**

RX Summit In Nashville

TDMHSAS was honored to participate in multiple panels during the 15th Annual **Rx Summit** in Nashville, joining partners and leaders from across the state to share insights, elevate recovery-focused work, and highlight the importance of collaboration in addressing behavioral health and substance misuse. These sessions provided meaningful opportunities to showcase Tennessee's progress, hear from individuals with lived experience, and explore strategies for supporting recovery in communities across the state.



Tennessee team gets a photo with Sara Carter, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)

The Long-Term Outcome: Where Recovery Meets Leadership

Presented by Monty Burks, Nathan Payne, Allan Burnette, and Jaime Harper, this session highlighted the recovery journeys of individuals in long-term recovery who now serve in leadership roles across government. Attendees heard powerful stories of perseverance, purpose, and the impact of lived experience in public service.

Finding Balance: Integrating Faith, Peer Support, and Overdose Prevention in the Recovery Journey

Presented by Ashlee Crouse, Kyle Prichard, Kristi Beeler, Joe Hoffman, and Monty Burks, this session explored the important role faith communities play in supporting individuals with behavioral health challenges. Attendees learned how houses of faith can be part of a wraparound approach to care while also serving on the front lines of recovery support and overdose prevention in Tennessee.

Innovation Through Data Collaboration: Tennessee's Cross-Agency Approach to Overdose Surveillance and Prevention

Presented by Cate Faulkner (DSAS Office of Prevention) with Arch Robertson (TN Department of Health), this session focused on how TDMHSAS and TDH work together to monitor drug trends across the state, develop public-facing materials, and inform prevention across the state. The session included encouraging state-level agencies to include community-based organizations as essential partners in monitoring trends, implementing prevention activities, and responding to overdose spikes. Cate also presented a poster about TDMHSAS's new youth substance use prevention curriculum, **TN Youth POWER (Prevention for Opportunities in Wellness, Empowerment, and Resiliency)**. These lessons

integrate interactive activities, multimedia resources, skill-building and engaging discussions to discuss the risks of substance use, the impact of substance use on mental wellness, and supporting friends/peers who may be struggling.

Findings from TDMHSAS-Funded Substance Use Prevention Community Coalitions

Andrea Pemberton, a PhD student at Vanderbilt University and member of the Evidence-Based Practice Workgroup, presented research on TDMHSAS-funded substance use prevention community coalitions. Drawing from both member and director survey data, the presentation examined how coalition organizational characteristics influence members' perceptions of their role and voice in coalition decision-making.

These are just a few of the panels where the "Tennessee experience" was on display for the audience of attendees from across the nation to learn and take back home with them. Thanks to everyone who shared their stories of recovery and hope!

Prescription Drug Take Back Day

The biannual National Prescription Drug Take Back Day brought together coalitions, community partners, and law enforcement agencies across Tennessee to help residents safely and anonymously dispose of unused or expired prescription medications on April 25. Substance Use Prevention Coalitions across the state partnered with local law enforcement to host about 100 take back sites. These events provided a convenient way for Tennesseans to clear out medicine cabinets, reduce the risk of misuse, and prevent medications from falling into the wrong hands.

By working together, communities across the state also helped protect the environment by keeping medications out of household trash and away from waterways. This strong statewide partnership reflects Tennessee's continued commitment to public safety, prevention, and environmental stewardship. Outside of the two annual Take Back Days, there are nearly 400 permanently placed drug disposal boxes located across Tennessee with at least one in every county. [Find a drop box near you at this link:](https://www.tn.gov/takeback)

[TN.gov/takeback](https://www.tn.gov/takeback)





Top left: Franklin County Prevention Coalition.

Top right: Stewart County Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention

Bottom left: Grundy Safe Communities Coalition

Bottom left: Sumner Prevention Coalition

TN Recovery Court Coordinators Annual Meeting



Kathryn Benson delivering a presentation on ethics and boundaries.

Tennessee Recovery Court Coordinators gathered April 13–14 in Brentwood for their 2026 annual meeting, a two-day event focused on strengthening services, sharing updates and building expertise across the state. The agenda opened with remarks from Taryn Sloss and Rebekah Provost-Emmons, followed by a session on Understanding and Treating Intimate Partner, Domestic, and Family Violence. Coordinators also heard from Jennifer Layman of Brain Links on the impact of brain injury in recovery court and received updates from Damien Nethery of Recovery Court University. Day two featured presentations on ethics and boundaries, housing pathways and department updates, along with important

guidance on TNWITS, budget revisions, communication expectations and certification requirements. The meeting provided coordinators with practical tools, policy updates and renewed collaboration to support the continued success of Tennessee's recovery court programs.

PATH Coordinator Annual Training



The men and women on the front lines of helping people who are living with behavioral health challenges while homeless gathered on May 4 for a day of training, sharing, and collaboration. The Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Coordinators work at seven community mental health agencies across the state. In addition to department updates, the one day training featured real world lessons learned about growing relationships with law enforcement and a panel discussion with a variety of different perspectives. You can find more about the PATH program in Tennessee at this link: <https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/housing/path.html>

Student Leaders Grow Through Action



The **TN AWARE Youth Conference**, themed “*Youth Voice Taking Action*,” successfully brought together student leaders from Bledsoe, Scott, and Shelby counties for a day of learning, collaboration, and empowerment on March 27. The conference featured **live youth performances and youth speakers**, highlighting the power of student voice and lived experience. Youth engaged in interactive sessions, wellness activities, and a Shark Tank-style competition, highlighting innovative, student-led approaches to promoting mental health and reducing stigma in their schools. The conference reinforced the importance of elevating youth voice and fostering leadership, equipping students with tools and strategies to support wellness initiatives in their communities.



Scott Justice Duncan



Destiny Hernandez

Melissa Binkley Receives Award

Congratulations to **TDMHSAS Director of Infant and Early Childhood Initiatives, Melissa Binkley**. She received the first-ever Matt Timm Award for Advancing Family Advocacy through the Pyramid Model! The award honors the legacy of Dr. Matt Timm, a visionary leader in early childhood development



Pictured left to right: Carolyn Timm, Dr. Mary Louise Hemmeter, and Melissa Binkley

and the Pyramid Model. This award celebrates a parent, family member, or professional who exemplifies meaningful family partnership and dedication to promoting children's social, emotional, and behavioral development through the Pyramid Model. Melissa received the award at the National Training Institute on Effective Practices: Addressing Challenging Behavior Conference in mid-April. Congrats, Melissa! [Learn more about the Pyramid Model and how it supports families and children with challenging behaviors at this link.](#)

RIP Happenings

RIP's Signature Program Gets New Name



Since its founding in 1969, the Regional Intervention Program (RIP) has served as a centralized hub for parenting and behavioral support at a time when resources for young children were limited and fragmented. Today, with resources and the field of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health continuing to grow, we're excited to adopt a name that better reflects who we are: a community that equips families with practical, proven strategies.

Beginning in 2026, the *signature program of TDMHSAS RIP* will be known as **"Parenting that Works,"** a phrase long shared by our team, echoed by families who complete the program, and even displayed on our sign out front. "Parenting that Works" highlights what we've always stood for—parents helping parents, helping children. Under this updated brand structure, the TDMHSAS Regional Intervention Program (RIP) becomes the umbrella for our full continuum of services, which includes Parenting That Works (our primary program), Parenting Workshops, and Community Trainings.

This change will help reduce confusion and streamline referrals while allowing families to find us under a name that clearly reflects what they're searching for: effective, collaborative support. If you've known us for years, we're still here—and we're still RIP—now with a name that truly represents the heart of what we do.

Spring Fest Welcomes Hundreds of Families



The Regional Intervention Program's third annual Spring Festival was blessed with perfect weather and hundreds of families and children. Attendees enjoyed a day of fun, connection, and access to valuable resources that support children's well-being. Many thanks to all of the community partners who showed up including our fellow state agencies: TDOT, Agriculture, DDA, and DHS.

TDMHSAS and Vanderbilt Partnership Highlighted at Symposium



Pictured Above (L to R): Dana Reno, Nashville Thrives; Andrea Pemberton, Vanderbilt Doctoral Student; Brian Christens, Vanderbilt Professor; Sharon Shields, Sr. Associate Dean; Ashley Leopard, TDMHSAS

TDMHSAS is proud to highlight a longstanding partnership with Vanderbilt University focused on evaluating and strengthening substance use prevention coalitions across the state. Since 2016, this community-engaged research initiative has supported 48 county-level coalitions by assessing effectiveness, building capacity, and tracking progress through surveys, interviews, and longitudinal data.

This work was featured at the Bridging Campus & Community: Community Engagement Symposium, where partners shared how the project has evolved from building foundational tools to applying findings in practice. This collaboration continues to strengthen data-driven decision making and support coalitions in implementing evidence-based strategies, with local impact demonstrated through efforts like Nashville Thrives. The Vanderbilt Graduate student, **Andrea Pemberton**, received the **Sharon Shields Award** for Graduate Community-Engaged Research in recognition of its reciprocal partnership model and scholarly impact.

Power of Putnam Hosts in New Office Space



Tiptop Prevents Coalition Serves on Panel

Tiptop Prevents, a coalition receiving TDMHSAS funds, was invited to serve as a panelist for a recent webinar hosted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), titled “Community-Initiated Care in Behavioral Health: Exploring Funding Mechanisms for Substance Use Disorders”. The session highlighted the growing national focus on sustainable, community-driven approaches to behavioral health, particularly innovative funding strategies that support community-initiated models designed to improve access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services. During the discussion, Robin Racine underscored the critical role of collaboration with community partners, reinforcing the importance of coordinated, locally informed solutions in advancing community-initiated care efforts.

Upcoming Events

National Council on Problem Gambling Conference

As sports betting continues to expand in Tennessee, now generating over **\$5 billion in annual wagers**, the need for awareness, prevention, and treatment of problem gambling is growing. In recent years, calls to Tennessee’s gambling help line have increased, underscoring the impact on individuals, families, and communities across the state.

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) Annual Conference, taking place this July in Nashville, brings together behavioral health professionals, researchers, policymakers, and community members to address these challenges. Attendees will gain insights into the latest research, effective treatment strategies, and prevention efforts to reduce gambling-related harm.

Train the Trainer Launches!



Pictured Above (L to R): Caty Davis Moss, TDMHSAS, Assistant Director of School-Based Initiatives; Natalie Looney, MHA of the Mid South, Erase The Stigma Middle Tennessee coordinator; Zakeria Clark, MHA of the Mid South, Erase The Stigma Statewide Coordinator; Kayla Oquendo, TDMHSAS, Director of School-Based Initiatives; Keri Virgo, TDMHSAS, Deputy Assistant Commissioner; Tara Morgan, MHA of the Mid South, Senior Director of Program Operations

Train with us to bring ETS-Y to your school or community by becoming an ETS-Y Trainer!

This training course empowers educators, youth workers, and leaders to deliver research-based mental health education that reduces stigma and builds resilience.

- **Equip** your community with practical tools to support youth mental well-being.
- **Gain** certification and a ready-to-use training toolkit.
- **Join** a network of trained facilitators making a measurable impact

This certification is Ideal for school leaders, counselors, youth program directors, and community partners.

Learn more here: [Erase the Stigma - Youth \[ETS-Y\] Train the Trainer](#)

Team Updates



Welcome to the team, Greg Bennett

The Office of Consumer Affairs and Peer Recovery Services is thrilled to welcome a new Assistant Director, Greg Bennett. Greg comes to us from Centerstone where he has worked for the past 14 years. Greg brings peer support credibility, having served as a CPRS since 2014, and a Peer Support Center Coordinator at Centerstone for his first four years there. He is a recognized peer leader in the state who has spoken as a subject matter expert at various conferences. He also offers deep experience in crisis services, including 10 years with the 988 lifeline and suicide prevention efforts.

Nikesha “Kesha” Rivera joins Office of Forensic and Juvenile Court Services



The Office of Forensic & Juvenile Court Services is excited to welcome new hire Nikesha (“Kesha”) Rivera as a Forensic Specialist. Kesha has been a social worker at MTMHI & FSP since 2019, with seven years of experience at MTMHI, including three years on acute units and four years on forensic units. She has also been with FSP for approximately six months and brings a wealth of direct experience and knowledge with forensic cases.

New Mental Health Court Program Manager Alysia Jimcoily

Alysia Jimcoily was recently hired as the **Mental Health Court Program Manager** making her the newest member of the DSAS Office of Criminal Justice Services (affectionately know as The Justice League 🦹).

She holds a master's degree in social work and brings more than 11 years of experience in behavioral health, with a strong background in forensic psychiatric social work and substance use services. She has worked in both hospital and correctional settings, supporting individuals involved in the legal system who are undergoing competency evaluations and treatment.



PLANNING & POLICY Council Meetings

Statewide Planning & Policy Council

Tuesday, June 9, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute, Conference Center
221 Stewarts Ferry Pike, Nashville, TN 37214

To verify the schedule and plans for future meetings, please visit the department website at these links:

[Statewide & Committee Meeting Schedule \(tn.gov\)](#).

[Regional Council Meeting Schedule \(tn.gov\)](#).

TDMHSAS is committed to providing individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from TDMHSAS programs, activities, and services. To request reasonable accommodations or modifications, please contact Amy Holland at amy.holland@tn.gov at least 10 business days prior to the meeting. Requests for accommodations or modifications made after the deadline will be honored to the maximum extent feasible, but it may not be possible to fulfill them.

Essential Resources



Call or text 988 and press 0 to talk to a trained counselor who can help. You can also chat with 988lifeline.org.



Call or text the Tennessee REDLINE at 800-889-9789 for free and confidential referrals to services.