



Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

The last snow has fallen (hopefully) and the first flowers are springing up-- the season of HOPE is upon us! So excited for the 6th annual Day of Hope coming up March 10. You'll read more about it below, but I'm so thankful to see how this celebration of the power of hope really struck a chord that resonated across the state. Of course, hope without action doesn't produce results. We are so grateful to the many, many supporters of our department who share not only their talent and abilities but the resources necessary to change lives. Resources to create beacons of hope like the new Crisis Wellness Center that Alliance is opening in Memphis and the transitional recovery campus that McNabb Center is building in Blount County, both of which you'll read about below.

Our first legislative budget hearing was with the Senate Health and Welfare Committee on February 19 ([watch archived video at this link](#)). Senators were receptive of Governor Lee's proposed budget increases for our department and highly complementary of the work that you all do on behalf of the Tennesseans

we serve. Our next budget hearing is Wednesday, March 5 at 8:00 a.m. (CST) with the House Finance, Ways & Means Committee. [As always, you can watch live during the hearing at this link on the TN General Assembly's website.](#)

May your day be blessed,

Marie

*Special thanks to Candice Brill-Tucker for sending the photo of Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute in the snow on February 19. She said by lunchtime it was all gone!*

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## Alliance Opens New Crisis Wellness Center in Memphis



Congratulations to the team at **Alliance Healthcare Services** on cutting the ribbon on their beautiful and expansive new Crisis Wellness Center. The new home for Shelby County's Crisis Walk-In Center and Crisis Stabilization Unit is located at 3200 Broad Ave. in Memphis. The department was excited to support construction of the new facility with a \$7 million directed appropriation included by Governor Lee in his FY23 budget.





The event was combined with a groundbreaking for the new Children's Crisis Stabilization Unit and Walk In-Center which will be built across the street. Alliance is targeting a January 2026 grand opening for the new facility for children.

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## McNabb Center Breaks Ground on Blount Co. Transitional Campus



Congratulations to the team at McNabb Center for breaking ground on their new Blount County Transitional Campus. With support from two TDMHSAS grants and an Opioid Abatement Council grant, the project is constructing multiple buildings to meet the multiple and diverse needs of people transitioning out of incarceration to new lives of recovery and wellness in the community. The TDMHSAS grants supporting this project will go to residential treatment beds for people working on substance use disorders and housing and enhanced supports for people with severe mental illness as they get out of jail. All told, the department's infrastructure investment is about \$4.5 million. As Commissioner Williams shared at the groundbreaking event, this project truly has an impressive vision and a great future ahead of it.



The McNabb Center team poses for a quick group photo at the groundbreaking.



Commissioner Williams and McNabb Center President and CEO Mona Blanton-Kitts know how to turn some dirt!

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## 6th Annual *Day of Hope* Set for March 10

Tennessee's sixth annual "**Day of Hope**" is fast approaching! The department initiated the Day of Hope in 2020 after hearing Governor Bill Lee speak on the power of hope several times during his first year in office. The event took off in its first year and then continued during the pandemic thanks to the support and enthusiasm of partners in communities all across the state. This year, partners have organized impactful events on the Day of Hope (March 10) and throughout the week and month. The department's Faith-Based Initiatives team is at the heart of this effort. You can find details on an event near you on their calendar at this link: [TN.gov/behavioral-health/faith](https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/faith)

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## Applications Open for Opioid Abatement Community Advocacy Panel

Tennessee's Opioid Abatement Council is excited to open applications for its **Community Advocacy Panel**. As announced at the December 2024 OAC meeting, the Community Advocacy Panel will be comprised of community members whose lives have been touched by opioid addiction. The panel will provide a platform for people with lived experience to inform the OAC about the personal and community impacts of opioid use disorder (OUD), identify gaps in services and propose tailored solutions, advocate for strategies to reduce stigma and enhance public awareness, and promote transparency and accountability in the use of opioid settlement funds. The application period is open through Friday, April 4. [For more information, visit the Opioid Abatement Council at this website.](#)

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## TABC Releases New Report on Alcohol in Tennessee

Our colleagues at the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) have just released their first ***Report to Prevent Underage Drinking, Drunk Driving, and Other Harmful Uses of Alcohol***. This report, commissioned by the Tennessee General Assembly in a law passed last spring, collects important data and policy recommendations related to the prevention of underage drinking, drunk driving, and other harmful uses of alcohol. The TDMHSAS Division of Substance Abuse contributed data and information to the authors, and the report could prove valuable to organizations working in prevention, treatment, and other sectors. [You can review and download the TABC report at this link.](#)

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## Collegiate Recovery Ambassadors Share Successes at UTK Symposium



The UT System recently held its first-ever conference on Grand Challenges, focusing on critical issues facing our state. One presentation came from the TDMHSAS team behind **Rocky Top Recovery**. This program at UTK uses student Recovery Ambassadors to create peer-to-peer opportunities for promoting recovery and mental wellness. Presenters: Jessica Youngblom, TDMHSAS Director of Strategic Initiatives, Grace Hardin, UTK Undergraduate Student, Rocky Top Recovery Ambassador, Elle Peeples, Alcohol and Other Drug Risk Reduction Coordinator, The Center for Health Education and Wellness, UTK, Vanessa Betancourt (virtual) UTK Graduate Student and Rocky Top Recovery Ambassador.

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## *Women of Worth* Creates Lasting Connection in Second Year



The second annual **Women of Worth conference** was a spirit-filled, soul-boosting, connection-creating time. Close to 90 women gathered in mid-February for the three day event at Paris Landing State Park. Participants shared that there just aren't words for how awe inspiring the conference was. Several said they were in or close to burnout, and the weekend's speakers, music, and fellowship were so rejuvenating. Commissioner Marie Williams was proud to participate on Sunday [with a message built \(of course!\) around a song.](#)

Many thanks to conference organizer Nikki Green and her amazing team of contributors for all their hard work in making this event a continued success: Melissa Fields, Sarah Mays, Dianne Sherrod, Shelby Fisher, Julia Ash, April Landry, Mary Evelyn Overton. Make sure you don't miss out on the announcement for the third annual Women of Worth Conference [by following their Facebook page at this link.](#)





Pictured Top Left: Jolie Shipley, Kate Parsons, Timbi from [TimbiTalks.com](https://www.TimbiTalks.com), Ashlee Crouse, Nikki Green, Top Right: Patricia Burks Jelks, Bottom Left: Carla Aaron, Commissioner Williams; Bottom Right: Commissioner Williams, Amanda Smythia

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Congratulations to all of the recent graduates of Tennessee's Recovery Courts! TDMHSAS staff were excited to attend the recent graduation at the 10th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court. Suzanne and Aaron were recognized by Judge Sandra Donaghy for their progress and completion of the rigorous program of self-improvement and accountability. The 10th district encompasses Bradley, McMinn, Monroe, and Polk Counties. Download our new onepager on Recovery Courts in Tennessee at this link: [TN.gov/behavioral-health/recoverycourts](https://TN.gov/behavioral-health/recoverycourts)

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# Celebrating Recreation Therapy Month



Shout out to all the amazing Recreation Therapy professionals who work across our Regional Mental Health Institutes! February was celebrated as National Recreation Therapy Month. The commemoration celebrates the role of recreational therapists and their services in the rehabilitation and overall improvement of health and wellness of patients in Tennessee and across the nation. Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute organized weekly events throughout the month including a snazzy sign display (pictured above) welcoming all who approached the hospital.



The Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute Adjunctive Therapy department provided some welcome merriment and entertainment at a Valentine's Day Social and Dance. AT Director Tyson Keller wanted to shout out the whole team for their efforts: Spring, Markia, Connie, Anthony, Kennedy, Debra, Jane, Tony, Alice, Dawn, Tiffany, Colleen, Charlene, and James. Up next is the art show in April!

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## Team TDMHSAS Updates

*Celebrating New Hires, Wishing Retirees a Fond Farewell*



Happy retirement to Lisa Brown after 27 years of state service! Brown retired in February as the much loved Social Services Director at Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute. Throughout her career, Lisa's leadership has been marked by empathy, resilience, and a vision for creating meaningful change. She has been instrumental in countless initiatives that have positively impacted our community, and her dedication has left an indelible mark on all who have had the privilege to work with her.



Happy retirement to Debby Weaver! The team at Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute celebrated Debby's 43 years of state service.

### ***New Faces, New Roles for RMHI IT Support***

After an extensive search and interview process, the TDMHSAS IT team has selected **Kelly McCaig** as our new ECR Product Manager. Many of you may already know Kelly from her role as an Advanced Business Analyst, where she has been a key player in supporting the Netsmart Avatar system and improving workflows. Prior to joining us, Kelly was the Lead Physician Practice Clinical IT Analyst at a county-owned hospital, where she managed three EHR systems across multiple practices. She also brings



experience in project management and system implementation from her time as a Clinical Informatics Analyst at a consulting firm.

**Russell Gillis** will be joining Team TDMHSAS mid-March as the new ECR Business Intelligence Manager. Russell brings more than 15 years of experience in Business Intelligence and data engineering, with a particular focus on the healthcare industry. He has worked with acute care facilities, healthcare startups, and most recently, UnitedHealthcare, where he led BI and data engineering systems for post-acute care patient discharges. His passion for using data to improve processes will be invaluable as we continue advancing our BI efforts.

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## Save-the-Dates



### *Planning and Policy Council Meetings*

The TDMHSAS Planning and Policy Council Committee meetings will resume in April.

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

[Statewide & Committee Meeting Schedule \(tn.gov\)](https://www.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](mailto: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.

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## Resources

*In the event of a mental health emergency ...*

Call or text 988 and press 0 to speak to a crisis counselor.

You can also chat with [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).



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*For questions about addiction treatment/referrals ...*



*We hope you've enjoyed this issue of the Update!  
If you have news to share (a story idea, accomplishment,  
provider news, etc.) or if you'd like to be added to the  
distribution list, please email: the Office of  
Communications at [OC.TDMHSAS@tn.gov](mailto:OC.TDMHSAS@tn.gov).*

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