



Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

We recently had the blessing to proudly represent Tennessee along with Deputy Commissioners Matt Yancey and Heather Gundersen, Chief of Hospital Services Ty Thornton, and Assistant Commissioner Sej West at multiple events in our nation's capital—from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors annual conference, to the CrisisNow 4 Conference, to an event with HHS Secretary Kennedy. I Gratefully attended

the National Behavioral Health Quality and Best Practices pledge event at the invitation of our friend and former colleague Dr. Monty Burks. We are so proud of how he is continuing his amazing work that started in Tennessee and expanding it across the nation.



In all of these events, it was so encouraging to hear how the **landmark investments Tennessee has made over the last eight years in services with our incredible community partners are truly the right interventions, in the right place, at the right time.** Crisis Services, School Based Behavioral Health Liaisons, Substance Use Prevention Coalitions, Certified Peer Recovery Specialists, Behavioral Health Safety Net for Children, Project Rural Recovery, Faith-Based Initiatives, and more – all these investments we have made with the support of Governor Lee and the General Assembly are truly transforming the future of recovery and wellness for Tennessee's young people. We know fewer youth struggling now means fewer adults struggling later in life, and that turns into **more Tennesseans thriving rather than just surviving!** The bottom line? Recovery is real and always possible.

May your work continue to be blessed,

Marie

MONTHLY Happenings

Celebrating 4 Years of the 988 Lifeline

Since launching in July 2022, the 988 Lifeline has received **nearly 300,000 calls, texts, and**

chats from Tennesseans experiencing mental health emergencies. Each year of the Lifeline has seen impressive increases in call volume and exponential increases in numbers of chat and text. In the most recent full state fiscal year (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026) there were more than **93,000 calls** to the 988 Lifeline from Tennessee which represents a **54% increase over the previous year**. There was also continued growth in chat and text where there were nearly 52,000 crisis contacts or a 42% year over year increase.



Tennessee's
988
lifeline
call. text. chat.



The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) is celebrating the fourth anniversary of the 988 Lifeline with a **new, state-specific brand for Tennessee**. The look will be used in promotional materials, billboards, merch, and more to get the word out about the lifesaving services offered by 988 calltakers in a mental health emergency. The Tennessee-specific 988 brand is designed to feel relatable, authentic, and timeless. It was designed by department staff at **no extra cost to taxpayers**, ensuring that all available funding for 988 promotion goes into increased awareness.

[You can download the TN 988 brand toolkit \(including graphics you can customize for your agency/organization\) at this link on Google Drive.](#)

Project Rural Recovery Expands Again



TDMHSAS has selected **Buffalo Valley, Inc.** and **Volunteer Behavioral Health Care System** to implement and operate two new mobile health units as part of **Project Rural Recovery**, expanding access to integrated physical health, mental health, and substance use services in underserved rural communities across Tennessee. Buffalo Valley, Inc. will operate a second Project Rural Recovery mobile health unit, expanding its successful existing program to serve Benton, Carroll, Henry, Houston, and Humphreys counties. Volunteer Behavioral Health Care System will launch its first Project Rural Recovery mobile health unit, serving Bledsoe, Grundy, Sequatchie, Van Buren, and Warren counties. Both organizations demonstrated strong experience delivering integrated, community-based care and established partnerships that will support long-term sustainability of the program.

Since its launch, **Project Rural Recovery has provided more than 23,000 clinic visits to 7,525 Tennesseans**, bringing preventive care, chronic disease management, mental health treatment, substance use services, peer support, and care coordination directly into rural communities. By reducing barriers to care and meeting people where they live, the program continues to improve access to integrated healthcare across the state. Contracts with both providers are expected to begin **October 1, 2026**, with mobile health services launching in the months that follow as the units are procured, equipped, staffed, and deployed. Learn more about Project Rural Recovery at this link: [TN.gov/behavioral-health/ruralrecovery](https://tn.gov/behavioral-health/ruralrecovery).

MTMHI Celebrates Milestone in Inpatient Psychiatric Care



Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute (MTMHI) is celebrating “One Year Strong,” marking a **full year without the use of seclusion or restraint in the hospital**. The milestone reflects several years of hospital-wide culture change, training, and collaboration centered on a simple question: *How can we do better for our patients?*

To learn more about the program, we interviewed MTMHI Nurse Executive Kelly Whitted. She shared that Staff shifted their focus from managing behavior to understanding what patients may be experiencing, supported in part by an empathy simulation which has been nominated by The Joint Commission as a best practice. In 2025, MTMHI removed its mechanical restraint beds entirely, a moment Whitted described as deeply emotional for staff who had worked toward the change. Whitted said the approach benefits both patients and employees by strengthening safety, trust, communication, coping skills, and recovery-oriented care. MTMHI is now sharing its lessons with Tennessee’s other Regional Mental Health Institutes and with hospitals beyond the state in hopes of reducing restrictive interventions for even more patients.

[Watch the full interview with MTMHI Nurse Executive Kelly Whitted at this link on YouTube](#) or [read the Q-and-A at this link](#).

MMHI Forensic Presentation

Memphis Mental Health Institute’s Forensic Coordinator, Timothy Hegarty, MSSW, and Forensic Psychologist, Dr. Deidre Sharp, participated in a criminal law panel titled “Navigating Forensic Mental Evaluations” on Thursday, June 25, 2026, at the University of Memphis



Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law's Wade Auditorium.

During the event, MMHI's presenters provided an overview of the forensic mental evaluation process, while public defenders offered perspective on how these evaluations function within the legal and courtroom context.

The event was continuing education for current lawyers and open to law students as well.

Youth Gambling Prevention and Awareness Work Group Convenes



The **Youth Gambling Prevention and Awareness Work Group** convened its first meeting July 21, bringing together fellow state agencies, partners and stakeholders from across Tennessee to develop practical recommendations for strengthening awareness and prevention of youth gambling. Special

thanks to Tony Jackson (pictured below right) and Mary Beth Thomas (pictured below left), Executive Director of the TN Sports Wagering Council, for taking time to present to the group and share important information on youth behaviors and the sports betting industry. The group will reconvene in late August to discuss its ideas for short-term and long-term strategies that drive prevention and awareness before finalizing the group's ideas.



Deputy Commissioner Matt Yancey helped welcome attendees of the **National Council on Problem Gambling** to Tennessee at their annual conference on July 23. About 700 attendees from across the country converged on Nashville for the opportunity to learn from each other and take new ideas home that improve their communities. The Gambling Clinic, Control the Trolls, and TAADAS all tabled at the event, sharing the good work done in the field of problem gambling in Tennessee.



National Recovery Court Conference Returns to Nashville



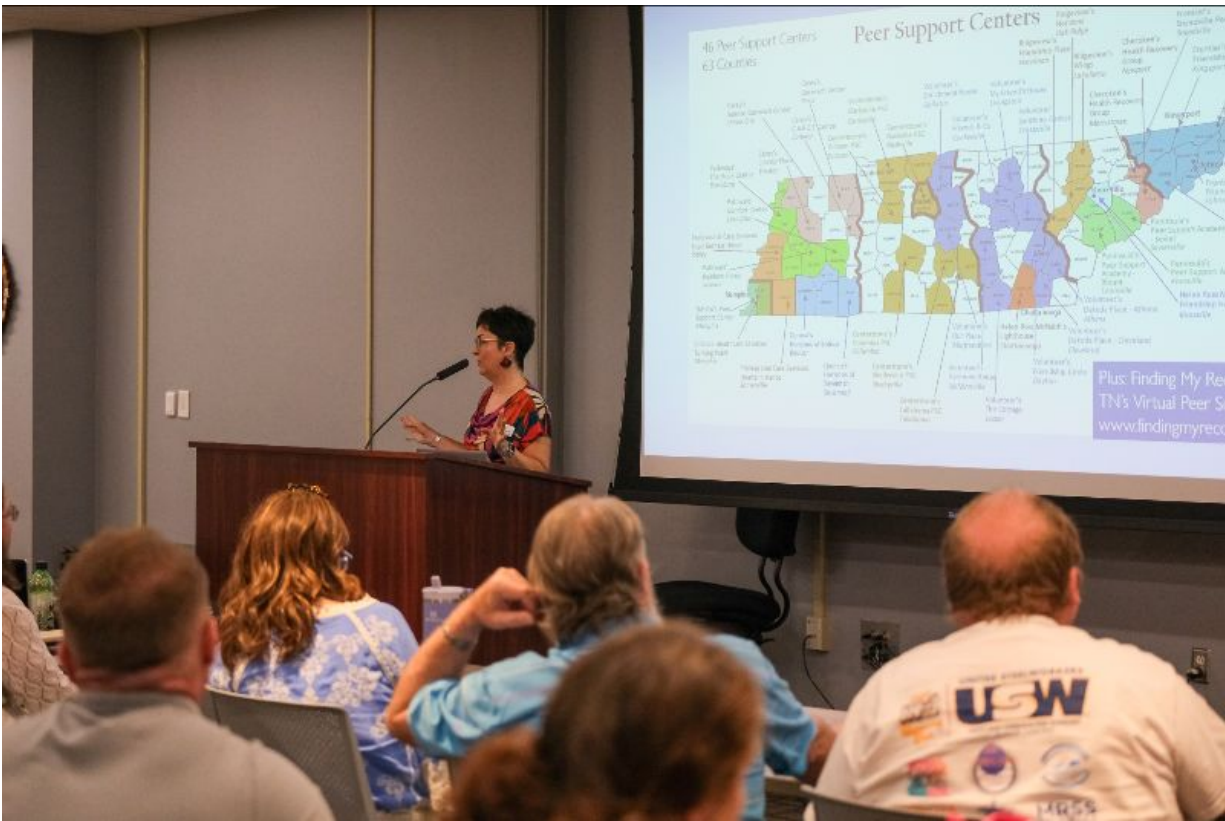
Tennessee recovery court professionals were well represented at the **All Rise RISE26 Conference**, held July 20–23 in Nashville. Attendees had opportunities to participate in training sessions with nationally-recognized subject matter experts, to learn about innovative approaches to treatment and recovery, and to connect with professionals from across the country. Their participation reflects Tennessee's continued commitment to strengthening recovery courts and improving outcomes for justice-involved individuals affected by substance use and mental health conditions.

Commissioner's Leadership Academy Graduation



Real, relevant, and meaningful - those are the leadership lessons in the **TDMHSAS Commissioner's Leadership Academy**. The most recent cohort celebrated their graduation on June 24 with remarks from Commissioner Williams and class representative Erica Hurst. In between classroom lessons on leadership, this CLA cohort made real friendships and professional connections that will serve them well. Participants came from all four of our Regional Mental Health Institutes and Central Office and represent the entire spectrum of roles titles. Special thanks to our TDMHSAS Human Resources team and our partners at the Department of Human Resources who make leadership development opportunities like this possible.

Peer Support Centers Annual Meeting



The women and men who make Tennessee's **Peer Support Centers** run smoothly gathered for their annual meeting on July 9. Attendees heard exciting updates from the department, learned great lessons on self-care and wellness, and heard how peer support can help people who are dually diagnosed with mental illness and an intellectual or developmental disability. [Learn more and connect with the Peer Support Center closest to you at this link.](#)

Team Updates

Tennessee Leaders of Tomorrow Success Story

MBMHI is proud to announce the promotion of **Anthony Sims** to HR Generalist 1!

Anthony began his journey with state government in December 2024 through the **Tennessee Leaders of Tomorrow Internship Program**. While pursuing his bachelor's degree in Sociology at Lane College, he spent his summer and holiday breaks working in the Human Resources Department at



MBMHI. Anthony graduated from Lane College in April and was promoted to his new role in May 17!

The Tennessee Leaders of Tomorrow Internship Program provides practical work experience while preparing future leaders for careers in Tennessee state government. Anthony had this to say about his experience, ***"I am excited to make a real impact. During my internship, you all allowed me to sit in on town halls, fully engage in team meetings, and really understand how the team operates. That experience made the transition to full-time much smoother than it would have been otherwise. I'm looking forward to continuing to build meaningful relationships while sharpening my HR skills."***

MBMHI is thrilled to welcome Anthony to the team full-time and looks forward to seeing his career grow with TDMHSAS!

Congratulations to MBMHI's Patient Rights Advocate, **McKay Nunley**, on earning his BA in Social Services from UT Knoxville! McKay started as a Psych Tech in April 2018, was the hospital's very first Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) in October 2021, before moving to the position of Lead Psych Tech in September 2022. When the position of Patient Rights Advocate became available, McKay stepped up to take the role in October 2024 and has excelled, all while pursuing higher education. Up next for McKay is a graduate degree in social work!



Pictured (L to R): Pierre Swafford, McKay Nunley, Corey Weldon



Social workers at MTMHI are unlocking **new licensure achievements!** They recently had two social workers become Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs). They also had six social workers become Licensed Master Social Workers (LMSWs) and begin their clinical contact hours and clinical supervision hours to work towards their LCSWs. Pictured above (L to R): Alea Whitfield, LMSW; Karly Kante, LMSW; Veronica Larson, LCSW; Sydney Williamson, LMSW; Jackie Rowe, LMSW; Jamie Russin, LMSW. Not pictured: Paul Hibbeler, LCSW.



Congrats to MBMHI's **John Jolley** on his election as the East TN Governor for the Tennessee Bar Association! John (pictured upper left, blue jacket) serves as Senior Associate Counsel in the Division of General Services.

The **Opioid Abatement Council office** is proud to celebrate the contributions of its summer intern, **Mary Scarlett**, as she concludes her time with the office. Mary Scarlett assisted in developing one-page summaries highlighting the impact of OAC-funded initiatives in communities across Tennessee. Her work will help communicate how opioid abatement investments are supporting local efforts to address the opioid crisis.

Reflecting on her experience, Mary Scarlett shared, ***"The past few weeks have been such an incredible learning experience! Getting to analyze the grants tailored to our communities' needs and break them down into organized informational summaries has taught me so much about the different pathways to impact and how my skills and abilities can play a part in that."***



Happy Retirement!

The team at Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute would like to wish a happy retirement to Pharmacy Tech **Pansy Blish**. She called it a career in June after 22 years of state service.



Upcoming Events

Save the date for Tennessee's Annual **All Peer Conference: September 21 and 22** at Trevecca Community Church in Nashville! This annual gathering unites all of Tennessee's certified peer programs including CPRS, CFSS, and CYAPSS. We'll be posting more details about the conference including registration link and hotel block information when it's ready at this link: [TN.gov/behavioral-health/allpeerconference](https://tn.gov/behavioral-health/allpeerconference)

SAVE THE DATE!

ALL PEER CONFERENCE



Healing Happens Here

BRINGING TOGETHER CPRS, CPRS-J, CFSS, AND CYAPSS



SEPTEMBER 21-22, 2026



TREVECCA COMMUNITY CHURCH
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



REGISTRATION
INFORMATION
Coming Soon!



SPEAKERS



RESOURCES



OPPORTUNITY
FOR NETWORKING



Department of
Mental Health &
Substance Abuse Services



TAADAS

Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug & other Addiction Services

**YOU'RE INVITED TO
RIP & PARENTING THAT WORKS**

Alumni Social

SNACKS-GAMES-CRAFTS

**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 26TH
3-5 PM**

**5020 DARLINGTON DRIVE NASHVILLE, TN 37211
PLEASE RSVP AT THE LINK BELOW**

PLANNING & POLICY

Council Meetings

Statewide Planning and Policy Council

Tuesday, August 11, 2026

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. CST

Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute

Conference Center

221 Stewarts Ferry Pike

Nashville, TN 37214

Region IV

Wednesday, August 5, 2026

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. CST

TAADAS

1321 Murfreesboro Pike, Suite 130

Nashville, TN 37217

Children's Committee

Wednesday, August 12, 2026

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. CST

Andrew Jackson Building

Conference Room 5.1 South, 5th Floor

500 Deaderick Street

Nashville, TN 37243

Region I

Tuesday, August 4, 2026

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST

Frontier Health Corporate Offices

1167 Spratlin Park Drive

Gray, TN 37615

Region V

Thursday, August 6, 2026

9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. CST

Volunteer Behavioral Health

1504 Williams Drive

Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Region II

Wednesday, August 12, 2026

11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. EST

McNabb Center, Healthy Families Room

201 West Springdale Avenue, 2nd Floor

Knoxville, TN 37917

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

988

SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

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.