

MARCH 2026

D B H D I D

NEWSLETTER

Building Our Co-Occurring Capable System of Care: What's Happened, What's Next!

Welcoming is a central tenet of building a co-occurring capable system. Importantly, welcoming isn't just done at the outset of care but is embedded in every interaction. We welcome every step of the journey and all the complexity we'll encounter together. In that spirit, we'd like to share more about the work we have started with ZiaPartners to build our co-occurring capability and want to provide some more information about what's happened so far, what's next, and how you can be a part of this work.

What is Co-Occurring Capability? Co-occurring capability means all programs, and all staff working in those programs, become welcoming, hopeful, strength-based, recovery- or resiliency-oriented, trauma-informed, and complexity-capable. This happens when programs organize themselves to deliver the most integrated, matched, hopeful, strength-based, best practice interventions they can within their mission and resources.

What is Co-Occurring? "Co-occurring" refers to any person, of any age, or family with any combination of a mental health and a substance use or addiction condition, whether or not that person has already been diagnosed.

How do we become a Co-Occurring Capable System? ZiaPartners has developed the Comprehensive Continuous Integrated System of Care Model (CCISC), a set of steps, tools, and strategies to help programs co-create a continuous quality improvement approach to gradually make changes in policies, procedures, and practices. DBHDID will learn how to use these tools and strategies to support providers through the transformation to become co-occurring capable. This Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach exists at two levels: 1) organizational CQI within each participating provider organization and 2) systems change CQI within DBHDID and our state ecosystem.

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Trauma and Resilience Team Update: Findings from the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire

This past summer, DBHDID staff participated in the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire, and we are encouraged by what we found. Notably, responses grew from 144 in 2023 to 180 in 2025, reflecting our collective engagement and willingness to share our voices.

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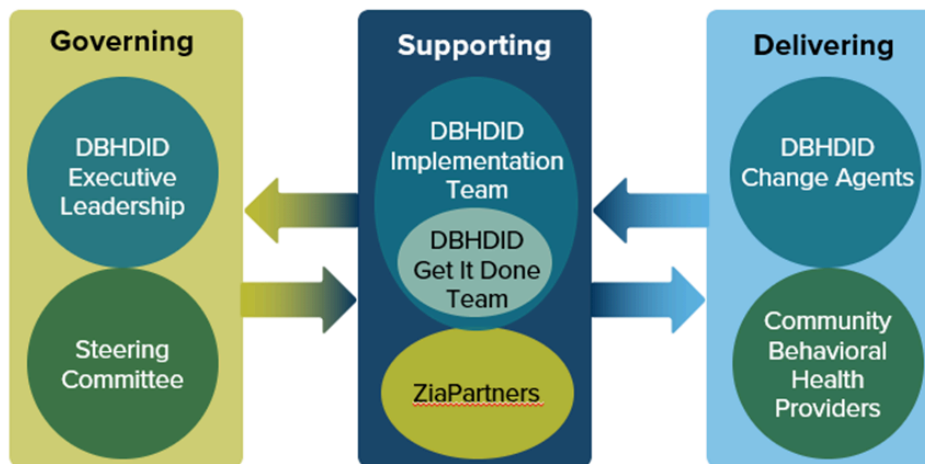
Building Our Co-Occurring Capable System of Care: What's Happened, What's Next!

What Co-Occurring Capability is not: Co-Occurring Capability is:

- NOT driven by specific diagnoses, provider or organization types
- NOT dual service provision or dual diagnosis programming
- NOT developing new billing codes or setting higher rates for Mental Health+Substance Use Disorder (MH+SUD)
- NOT promoting dual licensure for MH+SUD

How will we do this? We will use implementation practice and have developed this project management structure to implement a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process of ongoing transformation.

Co-Occurring Capable Implementation Structure



Governing, or guidance for system change, is provided by the DBHDID Executive Leadership Team and the Co-Occurring Steering Committee of community and agency partners. The Supporting role of the Implementation Team ensures that vision is operationalized and translated into strategies that can be implemented by agencies and DBHDID with their feedback. Delivery of the change happens through the work DBHDID does with our partners. Communication and feedback loops between governing, supporting, and delivering are critical to co-creation and successful implementation.

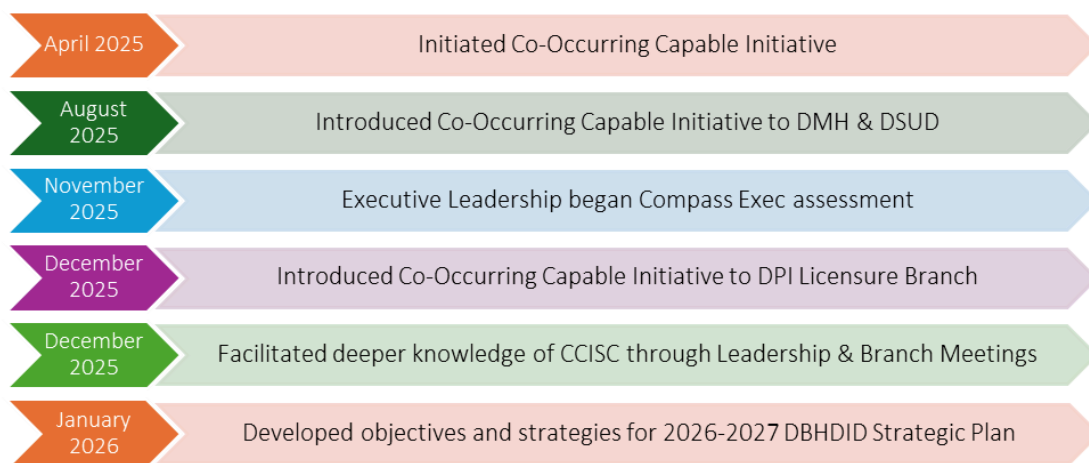
What is a Change Agent? Change Agents are DBHDID team members who develop expertise in the CCISC Framework to promote change within DBHDID and to support change in our partners. Change Agents will gather regularly to learn, share, brainstorm, and implement the process – as co-creators. Since we are starting to build our co-occurring capability for co-occurring MH and SUD, our first cohort of change agents will be comprised of staff working in those areas.

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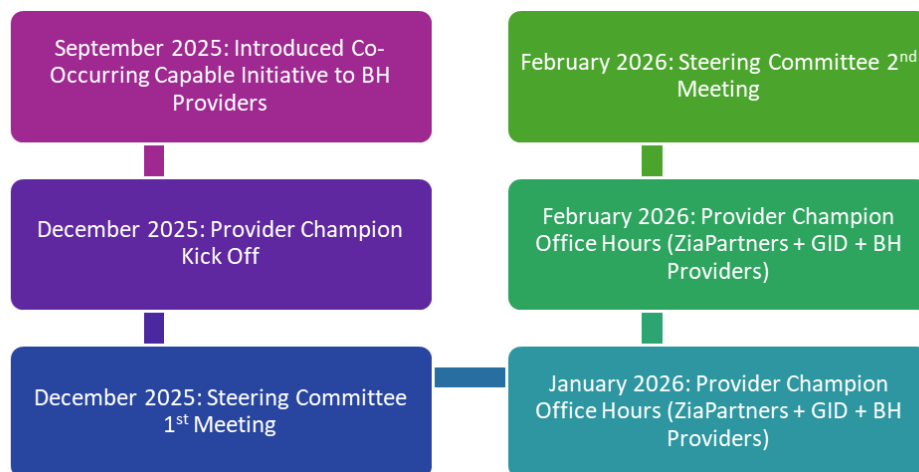
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Building Our Co-Occurring Capable System of Care: What’s Happened, What’s Next!

What’s happened so far in DBHDID? Commissioner Marks charged the department with building comprehensive and systematic co-occurring capability in Spring, 2025. By Summer 2025 we formed a Co-Occurring “Get it Done” Team of Dr. Caitlyn Hood, Breanna McGinnis and Miriam Silman. The Get it Done (GID) Team has been coordinating the work with ZiaPartners so far.



What’s happened so far with community providers?



What’s next? ZiaPartners will be in Kentucky for a site visit March 25 – 27. The Steering Committee will meet and identify opportunities to enhance policies, procedures and practices to be more co-occurring capable. DBHDID will continue to connect with interested Provider Champions (community partners) and increase our role in supporting their organizational transformation.

How can I get involved? You can always learn more by checking out the DBHDID Resource Folder. If you are interested in being a Change Agent, reach out to your Supervisor, and then to Dr. Hood, Breanna McGinnis or Miriam Silman to learn about next steps!

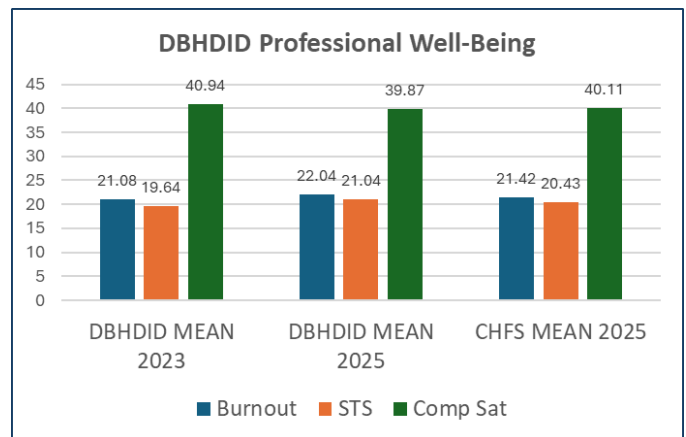
Trauma & Resilience Team Update: Findings from the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire

This past summer, DBHDID staff participated in the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire, and we are encouraged by what we found. Notably, responses grew from 144 in 2023 to 180 in 2025, reflecting our collective engagement and willingness to share our voices.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US?

Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) have remained **consistently low** across 2021, 2023, and 2025.

Compassion Satisfaction continues to hold **strong in the moderate-to-high range**. That is a good thing – we want higher Compassion Satisfaction!



Staff reported several things that remind us of what brings them contentment from their work:

- *“Having a good team and getting our goals completed.”*
- *“I know that possibilities do exist.”*
- *“Improving access and quality of treatment services for all Kentuckians.”*

Perceived Leadership and Organizational Support for resilience-building are both **trending upward**, and organizational support showed a significant increase from 2023. That momentum is meaningful:

- *“Our supervisors act as a family team who cares for one another as a team, no matter the job title. I would like to see this throughout the commonwealth.”*
- *“I appreciate Dr. Marks' leadership.”*

More than 75% of DBHDID respondents believe there is **moderate or high achievement of the CHFS Mission, the CHFS Vision & the CHFS Pillars**.

70% of respondents are actively taking care of themselves outside of work. That foundation gives us something important to build on as we work to strengthen supports within the workplace, too.

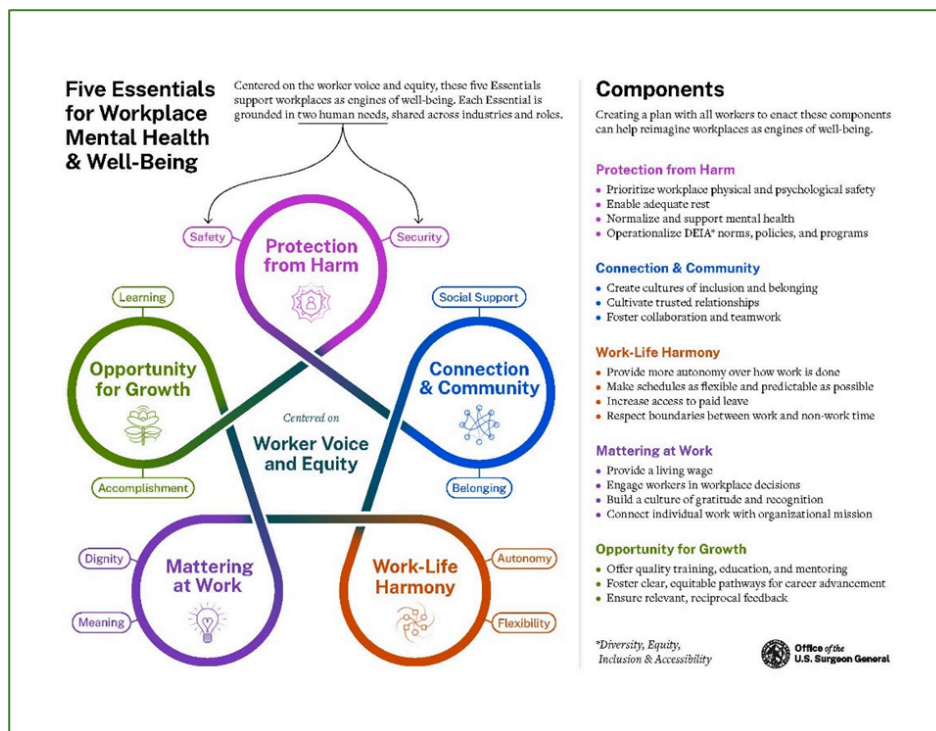
Our Task: How can we enhance organizational and workplace supports for building and sustaining professional resilience and well-being (and build compassion satisfaction), knowing that there are inherent risk factors for burnout and STS in the work we do?

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Trauma & Resilience Team Update: Findings from the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire

OPPORTUNITIES ON THE HORIZON

The Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being help us organize our work to promote resilience as an agency.



In alignment with the Five Essentials the following recommendations emerged from these findings and through dialogue among the Trauma and Resilience Team:

Connection & Community:

- Explore new opportunities for connection, collaboration, and awareness across branches and divisions.
- Connect staff with the right expertise by developing and sharing a go-to list of subject matter experts.

Opportunities for Growth:

- Expand access to professional development through training, coaching and resources (e.g., Resilience Resource Library) that equip staff to thrive.
- Create more opportunities for routine team feedback and reflection on successes and areas for growth.

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Trauma & Resilience Team Update: Findings from the 2025 Staff Resilience Questionnaire

- Identify and share tools and strategies to support DBHDID staff at all levels to effectively give and receive feedback.
- Develop a dedicated Employee Orientation explaining the Trauma & Resilience initiative, and what it means to do this work at DBHDID.

Mattering at Work:

- Celebrate staff through formal, meaningful, and intentional recognition and appreciation programs.
- Bring wellness to life through resilience-building activities such as walking groups and accessible stress management resources.
- Create more opportunities for employees to share their voices and ideas.
- Continue investing in physical workspaces where staff feel comfortable and supported.
- Help staff see and feel the connection between our daily work and our shared CHFS & DBHDID Vision, Mission, and Values.

If you are interested in learning more about or being a part of the Trauma & Resilience Team work, please reach out to any of our team champions: Dr. Brittney Allen, Brittany Barber, Dr. John Broadus, Patrica Brown, Amber Collins, Margaret Corneilson, Tal Curry, Ijeoma Eneje, Diane Gruen-Kidd, Melissa Hall, Melissa Hopkins, Levi House, Dr. Greta Jones, Deputy Commissioner Aundrea Lewis, McKenna Revel, Dr. Tena Robbins, Angela Rowe, Miriam Silman, Karla Thompson, Dee Dee Ward, Courtney Welsh, and Carolyn Wheeler.

Kentucky Community Crisis Response Team (KCCRT)/Disaster Team Spiritual Resilience Training

The newly developed Spiritual Resilience Training Course focuses on supporting responder wellness through science-based strategies that strengthen meaning, purpose, and resilience. The training emphasizes practical tools to reduce stress, support recovery, and build connections following a crisis and in everyday life. We encourage it for those in the first responder fields, as well as those in other Emergency Preparedness fields.

This training opportunity is available to agencies statewide as part of Kentucky's crisis response program. Agencies interested in scheduling a Spiritual Resilience Training for their staff may contact the KCCRT team for additional information and coordination, or see our website, [Training and Resources - KCCRT](#)

Equity Hub: Getting Ahead of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II Web Accessibility Rule

By: Brittney Allen

What is the ADA Title II Web Accessibility Rule?

In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a final rule updating Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For the first time, it sets a specific federal technical standard for digital content: [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) Version 2.1, Level AA](#).

This means our websites, mobile apps, PDFs, reports, online forms, videos, and other digital materials must be accessible to people with disabilities, including those with visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive impairments.

Why This Matters and Why We Want to Get It Right

Digital accessibility aligns with the mission, vision and CoCREATE values that we stand for as a department and is a natural extension of our existing commitments to equity, access, and operational excellence. While compliance is required, our deeper motivation is this: every Kentuckian deserves to be able to find, understand, and use the information we create.

Together, we have an opportunity to create digital content that reflects the full breadth of our work in a way that all Kentuckians can access and understand. By weaving plain language, universal design, and digital accessibility strategies into our everyday work, we can remove barriers, strengthen trust, and help people navigate our service system with greater ease. And as we grow in this area, we can positively influence our many partners to do the same.

A special thank you to the DBHDID staff who have already been putting in the hard work to learn and apply these new requirements, including Levi House, Laura Cunningham and others who have led the way. Your effort and dedication are making a difference, and now it's time for all of us to build on that momentum together.

Resources Available Now

In advance of the deadline, the Cabinet has developed go-to resources available through the [CHFS Digital Design Portal](#). We encourage all staff to explore the use of these tools.

Join Us: Equity Community of Practice - Digital Accessibility 101

Come learn what the Web Accessibility Rule means for your day-to-day work and walk away with practical, actionable strategies for creating more accessible materials.

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Equity Hub: Getting Ahead of the ADA Title II Web Accessibility Rule

By: Brittney Allen

We're offering two sessions with the same content. Join whichever works best for your schedule!

Session 1: April 8, 2026 | 12:00 – 1:30 PM

Session 2: April 15, 2026 | 12:00 – 1:30 PM

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Questions? Contact Brittney Allen at brittney.allen@ky.gov

Furthermore, our Division of Program Integrity is supporting this roll-out with training sessions, office hours, reference guides, and additional resources as they become available.

If you have immediate questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Chris Douglas at christopher.douglas@ky.gov

Children's Behavioral Health Matters

By: Patrick Fox

In a recent planning collaborative meeting with leadership in the DCBS Northern Bluegrass region, DCBS staff shared concerns regarding the implementation of the DPP-885 Screening and Assessment Acknowledgment Form. This form allows families to opt out of having their child complete the behavioral health screening tools and subsequent referral to a behavioral health provider for an assessment, when indicated. Specifically, they were concerned that families could select the option before being made aware of the benefits of both screening and assessment. To attempt to alleviate this concern, DCBS asked if KY SIX staff could assist by creating a one-page information sheet highlighting the importance of screening and assessment to not only benefit the families and children, but DCBS frontline staff as well.

This request was brought back to the children's branch, and a decision was made to update a screening and assessment informational brochure that was previously developed to support DCBS staff and family buy-in. Staff agreed that the updated brochure should include plain language that focuses on the benefits of screening and assessment and would not focus on referrals for assessment to a specific provider agency, as the previous version was specifically for referrals to a Community Mental Health Center.

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KY Six Shares Information on the DPP-885 Screening and Assessment Acknowledgment Form

By: Patrick Fox

As a result, a work group was formed that included Patrick Fox, Vanessa Pollard, and Kelly Dorman from DMH, representation from the three agencies that serve the KY SIX population of focus (DCBS, AOC, and DJJ), youth and parents with lived experience DCBS's screening and assessment program manager and clinical consultants, and feedback from DBHDID management. A one-time group meeting was held to gather suggestions and recommendations and to allow Levi House to make the edits in real-time. The updated brochure was created and shared with the group for one final review before submitting it for approval. The brochure has now been approved and can be accessed [here](#).

The work group's efforts led to a final brochure that includes plain language that is focused on the benefits of screening and assessment, which they anticipate will lead to an increase in youth completing screening and assessments across the state.

Introducing the DBHDID Strategic Plan Visual

By: Brittney Allen

With the launch of the 2026–2027 DBHDID Strategic Plan, Commissioner Marks offered a metaphor to envision the interconnectedness of the initiatives: a growing plant that is intentionally nurtured, deeply rooted, and always reaching toward the light.

The **sun** represents our guiding values: Collaboration, Choice, Respect, Equity, Advocacy, Trauma-Informed care, and Excellence (CoCREATE), which serve as the daily commitments that shape everything we do.

The **soil** is our operational foundation: cultivated, tended, and continuously improved through Communication, Practitioner and Organizational Quality, Data Quality Management and Utilization, Workforce Innovation and Development, Administration & Financing, System Navigation and Implementation Practice.

The **stem** reflects the cross-cutting lenses: Equity, Lived Experience and Community Engagement, Trauma & Resilience, and Co-Occurring Capacity; which keep people centered in every decision.

The **flowers** represent our cross-system initiatives: Child & Transition-age Youth Continuum of Care, Forensic & Re-entry Services, and Food is Medicine. Envision every petal as a nod to the full scope of our collective efforts. Each bloom is a different expression of what becomes possible when systems work together with people at the center.

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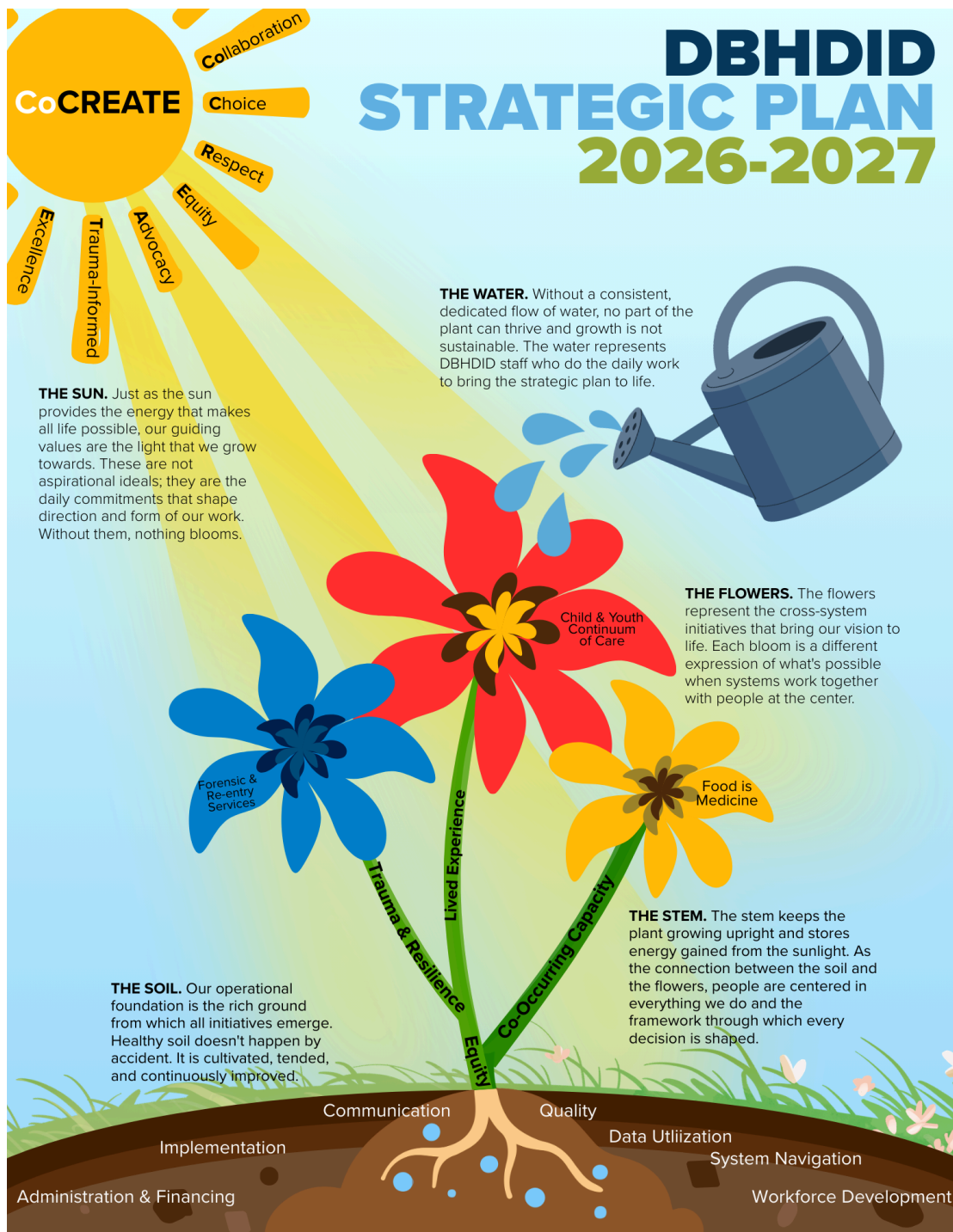
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Introducing the DBHDID Strategic Plan Visual

By: Brittney Allen

And the **water**: This represents our DBHDID staff, whose daily dedication brings the entire plan to life.

Special thanks to Levi House for turning this vision into something we can all see, share, and grow toward together.



Supporting Mental Health and Wellness as We Age

A Message from the Kentucky Mental Health and Aging Coalition (KMHAC)

Aging brings many changes, some expected, some challenging. Mental health is an important part of overall wellness at every stage of life, yet it is often overlooked as we grow older. The Kentucky Mental Health and Aging Coalition (KMHAC) exists to help change that.

KMHAC is a statewide coalition focused on improving mental health and emotional well-being for older adults across Kentucky. The coalition brings together partners from aging services, behavioral health, healthcare, advocacy organizations, community groups, and individuals with lived experience to strengthen how systems support older adults.

Rather than providing direct services, KMHAC works to connect people, share information, and improve coordination across the many systems that touch the lives of older Kentuckians. This includes elevating awareness of mental health and substance use needs among older adults, supporting suicide prevention and wellness efforts, identifying service gaps, and promoting approaches that are respectful, inclusive, and grounded in dignity.

A key part of KMHAC's work is ensuring that older adults, caregivers, and community partners know where to find information and how to work together more effectively. By creating space for collaboration and shared learning, the coalition helps communities build stronger, more responsive support for aging populations.

KMHAC is actively seeking new members and community representation.

We welcome participation from senior centers, aging and disability service providers, healthcare and housing partners, faith-based organizations, advocates, caregivers, and others who support or serve older adults. KMHAC also values the participation and membership of people with lived or living experience, including older adults, caregivers, and individuals with personal experience navigating mental health systems. Their insight helps ground the coalition's work in what truly matters to people and families. Membership offers an opportunity to stay informed, share perspectives, and help shape statewide efforts related to mental health and aging.

If you would like more information or are interested in joining the Kentucky Mental Health and Aging Coalition, please contact:

Amber Collins

Amber.Collins@ky.gov

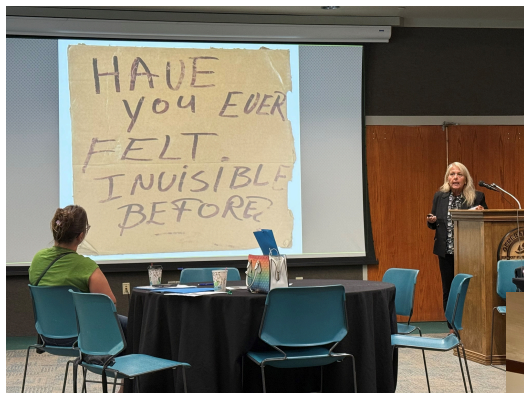
Together, we can reduce stigma, strengthen connections, and support mental health as a vital part of aging well in Kentucky.

TEAM SOAR (Team-Engaged Assertive Mechanics for SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery) State Summit Brings Partners Together to Strengthen Outreach and Housing Efforts

By: Maria Kemplin

In September, DBHDID hosted the TEAM SOAR State Summit at General Butler State Park, bringing together more than 80 participants from across Kentucky for two days of learning and collaboration focused on reducing unsheltered homelessness. TEAM SOAR is a SAMHSA-funded initiative that expands the SOAR model through street-based outreach, helping individuals experiencing homelessness connect to Social Security Insurance (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), behavioral health services, and housing supports. The summit convened community mental health centers, housing and service providers, and state and local agency partners who are involved in this work across the Commonwealth.

The agenda featured a mix of national and local perspectives, with sessions focused on what is working in communities and how systems can better align to support people experiencing homelessness. Topics included strategies to reduce unsheltered homelessness, Kentucky's progress in ending veteran homelessness, supportive housing, services for transition-aged youth, aging and disability resources, and approaches that recognize the importance of pets in outreach and engagement. Breakout sessions gave participants space to dig deeper into areas such as the 1915(i) RISE initiative, statewide SOAR coordination, and practical considerations for implementation. Feedback from participant evaluations across both days was positive, with attendees highlighting the relevance of the content and the value of connecting with partners from different systems and regions of the state. The summit reflected strong statewide engagement, with participation from a wide range of community partners, and reinforced the importance of collaboration in addressing homelessness. As TEAM SOAR continues its work, the summit served as an opportunity to share lessons, strengthen relationships, and build momentum for ongoing efforts across Kentucky.



KCCRT Receives the 2025 Governor's Service Award for Disaster Relief

By: Luke Hamlin

We're proud to announce that the Kentucky Community Crisis Response Team (KCCRT), administered by the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), will receive the Kentucky Governor's Service Award for Disaster Relief.

The award recognizes KCCRT's critical work providing immediate emotional support, stress management, and resilience-building services to disaster survivors, first responders, and communities across the Commonwealth.

For 30 years, KCCRT has responded to major events, including the 2021 Western Kentucky tornadoes, the 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods, and three federally declared disasters in 2025, assisting survivors through its statewide volunteer network and partnerships with CMHCs.

For instance, on Christmas Eve 2025, KCCRT volunteers assisted firefighters after a tragic incident, providing critical emotional care when it was needed most. Their work strengthens Kentucky's first responders, communities, and disaster survivors, helping communities recover more quickly.

The award, presented by Serve Kentucky in partnership with the Office of the Governor, will be given on April 23, 2026. Congratulations to all KCCRT volunteers for this well-earned recognition!

Learn More

For more information about KCCRT, visit kccrt.ky.gov. You can learn more about the Kentucky Governor's Service Award at [Serve Kentucky](#).

The responsibility to oversee KCCRT and Disaster Behavioral Health response has been held by DBHDID since 2022. Prior to this, these efforts were overseen by the Department for Military Affairs.

To see the impact of KCCRT and statewide Disaster Response efforts for 2025, check out the 2025 Year-End Report [here](#).

AOT in Action: Transforming Lives Across Kentucky

By: Tara Brewer

Kentucky's Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program is delivering powerful results for individuals living with serious mental illness—and for the communities that support them. AOT offers court-ordered, community-based treatment that connects individuals with psychiatric care, counseling, case management, housing assistance, and employment services to help people stabilize and rebuild their lives.

The impact is evident. Based on the latest data, among individuals involved in AOT:

- **83% reduction in mental health hospitalizations**
- **78% reduction in mental health emergency room visits**
- **67% reduction in inpatient and detox stays**
- **50% reduction in homelessness**
- **29% reduction in correctional facility involvement**
- **25% reduction in arrests**
- **85% report their mental health as good, very good, or excellent**

AOT is also helping individuals regain independence and reconnect with their communities. Full-time employment increased from 3.6% at entry to 11.8% within 12 months, a 228% increase. That means more Kentuckians returning to the workforce, supporting themselves and their families, and contributing to stronger local economies.

Beyond the numbers, Kentucky is now entering the next phase of understanding AOT's impact. The program has received approval to conduct interviews with judges, families, AOT participants, and providers to capture real stories behind the data—stories of recovery, stability, and renewed hope. These perspectives will help highlight how AOT is changing lives and strengthening communities across the Commonwealth.

Together, these outcomes show that AOT is not just improving clinical outcomes—it is creating safer communities, restoring dignity and opportunity for individuals with serious mental illness, and building a stronger Kentucky for everyone.

Implementation Practice Launch a Success

By: Team for Implementation Practice and Science (TIPS) 2.0

Leadership and the TIPS 2.0 Team congratulate DBHDID team members on the strong launch of Implementation Practice learning opportunities, with excellent turnout and engagement across recent trainings.

Recent highlights include:

- **January Implementation Practice 101:** 44 participants, with 29 completing all three sessions
- **Community of Practice (CoP) on Implementation Teams:** 25 participants; 21 attended at least two of the three meetings, and 14 attended all three
- **November Lunchable:** 21 attendees, including guest speaker Katie Stratton
- **January Lunchable:** 19 attendees, including guest speaker Phyllis Millsbaugh

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. **100% of respondents** from both Implementation Practice 101 and the CoP reported increased knowledge and confidence in applying implementation science tools in their work.

Participants appreciated the practical format of the sessions. One participant shared, *“I really love the breakout rooms that allow us to practice what we’re learning along the way.”* Another noted, *“[Implementation practice] was still a bit of a unicorn for me prior to this CoP, and now I can see multiple ways that I was either already using or can use moving forward.”*

The next Implementation Practice 101 kicked off on March 17 and will run through the rest of the month. The next 101 will take place in July, and registration will be available soon.

Learning continued with a [March Lunchable](#), featuring an overview of the **Implementation Practice Professional Development Plan**, along with time for questions and real-time project feedback.

The TIPS 2.0 Team appreciates the important work that department team members carry out each day and the continued integration of implementation science skills, tools, and resources into practice. Your commitment to expanding expertise in this area is recognized and valued!

Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DDID) Staff Dedicated to Ensuring Kentucky Providers are Equipped with the Best Knowledge and Practices

By: Bradley Brown

Carolyn Wheeler, Provider Development Specialist with DDID and a longtime advocate, is dedicated to ensuring Kentucky’s providers who serve the Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (IDD) population are equipped with the best knowledge and practices. She’s also dedicated to helping to bring good ideas into our state and had one such opportunity last fall.

In October, she counted herself as fortunate to be among 300 people who attended the Inclusion Seekers Summit hosted by Starfire at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Starfire is an organization with a mission statement to: “Work closely with people with disabilities and their families as they build social connections based on strengths and joyful action,” and “to share learnings from their collaborations to change mindsets about what is positive and possible for people with disabilities.” A mission very closely aligned with Carolyn herself!

The keynote speaker at the summit was Dr. Vivek Murthy, who was the 19th and 21st US Surgeon General. Instead of a speech, Dr. Murthy was asked thought-provoking questions by a member of the Starfire Board and a prominent disability advocate. Dr. Murthy's answers were graphically recorded by Brandon Black with Drawnversation:



Carolyn was excited to share her “takeaways” from the conversation with Dr. Murthy. She puts them like this:

1. What is it I am called to do? We are all called to believe in community and build community.
2. Do I show up and truly LISTEN to what people say they need?

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DDID Staff Dedicated to Ensuring Kentucky Providers are Equipped with the Best Knowledge and Practices

By: Bradley Brown

3. Connecting at work - for each staff meeting, one person would bring in personal photos and share them (Show and Tell). We learned a lot about one another and connected on a human level.
4. The true meaning of life comes from relationships, purpose, and service.
5. Each day, spend five minutes connecting with someone, five minutes helping someone, and five minutes of solitude.

If you are committed to these same ideas or if you'd simply like to hear more about her experience at the conference, DDID, or the Inclusion Seekers, let me recommend chatting with Carolyn! You can reach her at Carolyn.wheeler@ky.gov

Removing Barriers to Recovery: Introducing the Barrier Relief Assistance, Coaching, and Employment (BRACE) Program

By: David Brumett



The Kentucky Overdose Response Effort (KORE), within the Division of Substance Use Disorder, has been working over the past several months to launch a redesigned recovery support initiative called BRACE – Barrier Relief Assistance, Coaching, and Empowerment.

The goal of BRACE is simple but powerful: remove practical barriers that often stand in the way of long-term recovery. These include unstable housing, lack of transportation, or inability to afford items needed for employment. BRACE ensures that individuals receive both immediate assistance and ongoing recovery support.

BRACE is currently being piloted in five Recovery Community Centers (RCCs) across Kentucky and will expand to all fifteen KORE-funded RCCs later this year. Rather than operating as a stand-alone service, BRACE is integrated into the broader recovery support services already offered at the RCCs.

The project is being led by David Brumett (david.brumett@ky.gov) and Brandon Fitch (brandon.fitch@ky.gov), working closely with RCC partners and RTI International, which has provided intensive coaching and implementation guidance.

As BRACE expands to all fifteen KORE-funded RCCs, it reflects DBHDID's continued commitment to strengthening recovery support across Kentucky and helping individuals move from crisis to stability and long-term recovery through the dedicated work of RCC staff and peer recovery coaches.

Kentucky Selected as a National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) Core State

By: Bradley Brown



We are thrilled to announce that Kentucky has been selected as a **National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON)** core state for FY26-FY28. This is not the first time we have received this honor. NEON technical assistance and support have helped Kentucky build the Employment First Council, improve Customized Employment training for IDD, and design the supported employment and education components for 1915 i-RISE (Recovery, Independence, Support, Engagement).

Thirteen primary Kentucky agencies and community organizations collaborated on the submission. These include Office of Voc Rehab, DDID, UK Human Development Institute (HDI), KY Protection and Advocacy, Center for Accessible Living, the Employment First Council, Goodwill, and KY APSE (Association for People Supporting Employment). Kentucky is one of only SEVEN states to be chosen for this initiative!

What is NEON?

NEON was formed in 2019 to increase states' capacity to provide Competitive Integrated Employment. Learn more here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/neon>

Tell us what we've won!

Kentucky has been awarded **550 hours of FREE subject matter expert** technical assistance from the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) per year for the next three years! The following areas will be the focus:

- 1. Addressing the impact of wages on benefits*
- 2. Establishing data collection and analysis practices to inform future decisions*
- 3. Successful implementation of Kentucky's i-RISE Initiative and its integration into the service system*
- 4. Ensuring the delivery of high-quality employment services*
- 5. Increasing the knowledge base of case managers and vocational rehabilitation counselors*

Congratulations to everyone who helped make this happen, especially Jeff White and Carolyn Wheeler. Please contact Jeff White at jeff.white@ky.gov if you would like to be involved in Kentucky's NEON efforts. You can read the news release here:

<https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/odep/odep20260310>.

Staff Spotlight



Please join Nikki & Greta in welcoming Christopher Douglas to the DBHDID team as the Program Support Program Manager.

Christopher (Chris) has over 20 years of progressive experience in postsecondary education, customer service, and administrative leadership. He has a strong track record of guiding cross-functional teams, managing enterprise systems, operations management, and delivering results in dynamic and customer-centered environments.

Chris is a native of Frankfort, KY. He's married and has two teenage sons.

He's a graduate of Sullivan University, where he obtained his MBA, a bachelor's in business management, and another bachelor's in marketing and sales management. In his spare time, he enjoys coaching club and middle school soccer in the local community.



The Division of Mental Health is pleased to welcome Christina Ellison, MSW, CSW, who joined DBHDID on November 16 as the Housing and Homeless Services Program Administrator.

Christina brings more than 15 years of experience working with adults living with serious mental illness, with a strong focus on supportive housing and homelessness services.

Prior to joining DBHDID, she served as Director of Programs at New Beginnings Bluegrass, where she oversaw supportive housing initiatives,

ensured compliance with federal and state housing programs, and helped expand community partnerships to increase housing opportunities for individuals with SMI.

Her previous roles also include Director of Homeless Programs at New Beginnings Bluegrass, Substance Use and Mental Health Care Coordinator at Bluegrass Community Health Center, and earlier clinical and support roles with New Vista and Eastern State Hospital.

Christina holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Kentucky and is a Certified Social Worker in Kentucky.

In her role with DBHDID, Christina will support statewide housing and homelessness initiatives, working with partners across Kentucky to strengthen housing access and recovery-oriented services for individuals with serious mental illness.

Please join us in welcoming Christina to the DBHDID team.

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Staff Spotlight



The Division of Mental Health is pleased to welcome Dr. David Ayer, who joined DBHDID on March 1 as the First Episode Psychosis (FEP) Program Administrator.

Dr. Ayer brings nearly 30 years of experience in behavioral health research, program development, and clinical systems focused on serious mental illness and early psychosis. His professional background includes roles at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Centerstone Research Institute, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and Eli Lilly and Company, where he most recently served as a Senior Patient-Focused Outcomes Scientist.

Throughout his career, Dr. Ayer has worked extensively in schizophrenia and early psychosis research, coordinated specialty care models, and implemented evidence-based practices. He has also contributed to research initiatives and collaborations related to early psychosis and serious mental illness across academic and community settings.

In his role with DBHDID, Dr. Ayer will support the development and oversight of Kentucky's First Episode Psychosis programming and help strengthen coordinated specialty care services across the Commonwealth.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Ayer to the DBHDID team.

DBHDID Committee will Focus on Planning Staff Events and Activities

By: Laura Edwards

INTRODUCING THE DBHDID "HYPE TEAM"!

Bringing Energy, Engagement & Fun to Our Department



We are excited to announce the launch of our new DBHDID committee focused on planning events and activities that promote team-building and connection across our department. The DBHDID "Hype Team" will be sending out updates and invitations for activities that everyone can participate in throughout the year.



We Heard You.

It's time to put a little more FUN into our work environment!

Have an idea for a future activity?
Contact: Deputy Commissioner Aundrea Lewis
Aundrea.Lewis@ky.gov

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Recovery Corps Launches in Kentucky

By: Rachael Ratliff

Commissioner Marks emphasized the importance of finding creative, financially responsible solutions to workforce challenges, noting that partnering with Ampact, one of the largest and most experienced AmeriCorps administrators in the country, means building on what works rather than starting from scratch. She went on to affirm that every Kentuckian deserves compassionate, intentional, and meaningful services, ones that are innovative, grounded in evidence, and responsive to what communities actually need.

Additional remarks were offered by Dr. Brittney Allen, Executive Advisor at DBHDID; Katie Thompson, Executive Director of Recovery Corps Kentucky; and Caitlin Bottoms, Program Officer at Serve Kentucky, along with representatives from partner sites and members themselves.

About Recovery Corps

Originally launched in Minnesota in 2017, Recovery Corps expands access to care and promotes recovery of individuals working to overcome substance use disorders through:

- **Peer Support:** Recovery Navigators provide direct support to individuals on their recovery journey.
- **Capacity Building:** Project Coordinators help organizations strengthen their infrastructure and service reach.
- **Workforce Development:** Members receive training and professional development that prepares them for careers in recovery and human services.

What makes Recovery Corps distinctive is its embrace of the full spectrum of lived experience, including justice involvement, housing instability, mental health challenges, and more. Members convert their own journeys into meaningful service, helping close gaps between providers and the people who need them. Recovery Corps meets critical needs today while building the workforce Kentucky will need tomorrow.

If you'd like to learn more about Recovery Corps, please reach out to Rachael Ratliff (rachael.ratliff@ky.gov).



Workforce Innovation & Development Invite

By: Vestena Robbins and Brittney Allen

Join the WID Collaborative!

The Workforce Innovation and Development (WID) Collaborative is a cross-sector group convened by the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID) to strengthen the behavioral health and intellectual and developmental disabilities (BH/IDD) workforce across the Commonwealth.

We bring together BH/IDD providers, community, academic, and workforce partners, and state agency staff to share knowledge, align strategies, and drive meaningful progress on shared workforce challenges. Whether you're on the front lines of service delivery or shaping policy, your perspective matters here.

NEXT MEETING DETAILS

Date: April 15, 2026

Time: 2:00 – 3:30 PM

Format: Virtual

The upcoming meeting will feature a presentation on the Rural Health Transformation (RHT) initiative being led by DBHDID, followed by a facilitated discussion with Collaborative members. This is a great opportunity to learn about the RHT and how it may intersect with your workforce goals.

This event is open to all BH/IDD providers, community partners, and state agencies across Kentucky.

[REGISTER HERE](#) for upcoming WID meetings.

For questions, please reach out to Drs. Tena Robbins (vestena.robbins@ky.gov) and Brittney Allen (brittney.allen@ky.gov).

The DBHDID Update is published quarterly for employees and friends of the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities. News items are welcome and should be submitted to Christopher Douglas and Laura Cunningham.

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Commissioner Dr. Katie Marks

Our mission is to promote health, well-being, and resilience for all, facilitate recovery for people affected by mental illness and substance use, and support people with intellectual or other developmental disabilities.