



# **The 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

## ***Behavioral Health in a Changing Environment: Adapting and Thriving***

**October 26th – October 29th 2025  
Renaissance Arts Hotel  
New Orleans, Louisiana**



Photo Credit: ©M.E. Smith

***National Dialogues on Behavioral Health Partners:  
The National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)  
The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Behavioral  
Health Program (WICHE-BHP) and  
The National Association of County Behavioral Health and Disability Directors  
(NACBHDD)***

# CONFERENCE AGENDA

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## SUNDAY, October 26th - PRE-CONFERENCE

**9:00 – 9:30     Registration and Coffee**

**9:30 – 12:30     *Cutting Edge Strategies and Lessons Learned in Behavioral Health  
Disaster Planning and Management***

Disasters caused by naturally occurring events or by man-made events affect systems, organizations, communities, families/individuals and responders/providers. The ability to effectively address emergencies resulting from disasters requires the development of strategies and coordination across a range of federal and state agencies, municipalities, counties and community-based organizations to address public health and medical health needs as well as infrastructure. Given the number of natural and man-made disasters in recent years, what have we learned from responding to these events? This session will discuss lessons learned that can be used to inform behavioral health disaster planning and management now and in the future. In some ways, these models are useful for informing the design for the future of the behavioral health system as a whole---the theme of this conference!

The following questions will be addressed: What strategies have been used that have resulted in the most effective outcomes at the state, local, provider/responder and consumer level? How are effective partnerships developed to ensure that individuals with behavioral health needs receive services when disaster strikes? This thought-provoking pre-conference session will include practical lessons learned from a county-based behavioral health coalition and behavioral health responders that have provided behavioral health disaster responses.

*Speakers: Tanya McGee, Imperial Calcasieu Health Service Authority (LA); Shari Sinwelski, Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center (CA); Melanie Witmeier, Henderson County Department of Public Health, (NC); TBD*

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## MONDAY, October 27th, 2025

**8:00 – 8:30 AM     Registration and Continental Breakfast**

**8:30 – 8:45 AM     Welcome and Overview – Vijay Ganju, Ph.D. President NDBH**

**8:45 – 10:00 AM     Strategies to Address Policy and Funding Changes – Part 1**

This session will provide an overview of policy and funding changes that have occurred, and are occurring, at federal and state levels, and behavioral response strategies that have been developed to address these changes. Some of these responses may be preliminary and in the

planning stage. However, clearly, there are major changes taking place in the federal health policy and funding landscape, as well as in the restructuring of health and human services.

At the state level, a major issue is how behavioral health will advocate for its share of the Medicaid “pie.” This in turn will affect local funding implying that local agencies may need to prepare to seek alternative sources of support and develop new partnerships. The objective of this session is for the speakers to share information about these issues so that they can be the basis for discussion and dialogue with conference attendees.

*Speakers: Kirsten Beronio, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (VA); Carrie Slatton-Hodges, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Research Institute (VA); Jonah Cunningham, National Association of County Behavioral Health and Disability Directors, National Association for Rural Mental Health (DC)*

**10:00 – 10:15 AM Break**

**10:15 – 11:00 AM Strategies to Address Policy and Funding Changes – Part 2**

**11:00 – 12:00 Facilitated Dialogue**

**12:00 – 1:30 PM Lunch on Your Own**

**1:30 – 2:45 PM Access for People with Complex Needs – Part 1**

This session will delve into the intricate intersection of psychotic disorders, co-occurring substance use disorders, and homelessness. The speakers will highlight the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by persons grappling with these overlapping conditions, the data surrounding the prevalence and costs to systems of this population including the criminal justice system, child welfare systems, Medicaid and overall state budgets as well as the costs to provide services to this population, which is often difficult to track, locate, or engage. It will also highlight evidenced based or promising practices and programs pertaining to treatment. One of the key takeaways will be the critical role of cross-sector collaboration among mental health services, substance use treatment and recovery programs, and housing support agencies. The presentations will also shed light on innovative strategies and best practices that have shown promise in improving outcomes for this population.

*Speakers: Sarah Babcock, Public Health-Jefferson (LA); Ashley Weiss, DO, Tulane University EPIC Program (LA); Mark Reynolds, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services(OK); Deborah Levy, M.D., MPH, former Director of “Street Psychiatry” program in New Orleans (LA)*

**2:45 - 3:00 Break**

**3:00 – 3:45 Access for people with Complex Needs – Part 2**

**3:45 – 4:45 Facilitated Dialogue**

**5:00 – 6:30 Reception and Networking (Art Gallery)**



Join us for hor d'oeuvres and beverages in a relaxed and collegial atmosphere while having an opportunity to dialogue with today's speakers and other attendees to learn more about the interventions and collaborations discussed during today's sessions.

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**TUESDAY, October 28th, 2025**

**8:00 – 8:30 Registration and Continental Breakfast**

**8:30 – 9:45 Building the Future System of Care: A Blueprint for Moving Challenges to Solutions – Part 1**

States, counties, and localities have been working to develop a system of care that provides services that meet the level of care an individual may need. Many states have worked hard to develop Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), 988 and crisis services, peer support services, and services that help individuals stay out of crisis, including employment and supported housing. However, states and localities also face challenges in addressing competency issues, forensic issues, and a renewed emphasis in increasing state psychiatric hospital beds. As states, counties, and providers experience a recent tightening of budgets, decisions must be made on how to maintain a focus on building the community-based continuum of care even while budgets may be shrinking.

This session will provide an overview of the status of the different aspects of the system of care and a blueprint leaders can utilize to navigate challenging budget environments to get the best value from the funding available. Presenters will discuss how using value-based principles, such as person-centered treatment planning, can help guide funding priorities to best help meet the needs of the people they serve. Participants will learn how to take advantage of all the ways to leverage and increase funding; the critical role of partnerships and how to develop them, including how to engage and encourage cross system partnerships; and how the combination of these approaches and the use of value -based principles can ultimately result in making the case for investment in behavioral health to build an effective continuum of care.

*Speakers: Carrie Slatton-Hodges, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Research Institute (VA); Sheamekah Williams, Evolution Foundation (OK)*

**9:45– 10:00 Break**

**10:00- 10:45 Building a Strong System of Care: A Blueprint for Moving Challenges to Solutions – Part 2**

**10:45 – 11:45 Facilitated Dialogue**

**11:45 – 1:15            Lunch on Your Own**

**1:15 – 2:30            Behavioral Health Science: Best Practices and the Changing Landscape – Part 1**

As the field rapidly adapts and changes, systems and professionals must navigate shifting policies, emerging research, and innovative treatment models to provide effective care. This expert-led panel will explore some of those best practices and examine how societal needs, workforce challenges, and changing policies are shaping the future of mental health and substance use treatment. Panelists will discuss the use of research-based programs proven to offer more effective treatments based on observable outcomes; the policies and systemic changes that impact workforce development and service delivery; and how we can ensure behavioral health care is inclusive and accessible for all communities. Join in this dynamic conversation as our panelists provide insights into the changing landscape of behavioral health and explore actionable solutions for the future.

*Speakers: Christine Bonura, MSW, MST Adaptations (LA); Annie Niermann, FFT, LLC (NY); Sarah Walker, Ph.D., University of Washington (WA); Berre Burch, Ph.D. Director Children's Bureau of New Orleans (LA)*

**2:30 – 2:45            Break**

**2:45 – 3:15            Behavioral Health Science: Best Practices and the Changing Landscape – Part 2**

**3:15 – 4:15            Facilitated Dialogue**

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### **WEDNESDAY, October 29th, 2025**

**8:00 – 8:30            Registration and Continental Breakfast**

**8:30 – 8:45            The Future Workforce – Part 1**

The future behavioral health system will be shaped and determined by the future workforce. The key questions are: What are the workforce models to address the growing shortages in the behavioral health workforce, including new and shifting roles, telehealth support, and expanding behavioral health roles in partner agencies? What models exist at the state level for training and education of the future behavioral health workforce? and What are local agencies doing to support workforce development and support?

For the last several decades severe shortages have been projected for psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and social workers. At the same time there are new roles emerging related to peer services and new demands in partner agencies such as law enforcement and child welfare. These problems are exacerbated in rural and sparsely populated areas. The speakers for this session will address these questions and propose models and solutions that can address the development of the behavioral health workforce of the future at different levels.

*Speakers: Jennifer Black, Carelon Healthcare Services (CT ); Joseph “Chip” Johnson (MI); Kelly Hughes (invited), National Council of State Legislators (DC)*

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| <b>9:45 – 10:00</b>  | <b>Break</b>                                      |
| <b>10:00 – 10:45</b> | <b>Workforce Development and Support – Part 2</b> |
| <b>10:45 – 11:45</b> | <b>Facilitated Dialogue</b>                       |
| <b>11:45 – 12:00</b> | <b>Wrap-up</b>                                    |

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## **National Dialogues Conference Hotel Reservations**

**Renaissance Arts Warehouse District Hotel  
700 Tchoupitoulas Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130**

We are pleased to be able to offer a nightly rate of \$157 plus applicable state and local taxes and a New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau Assessment Fee of 1.75% of the room rate per night. Room rates are based on single/double occupancy. Each additional person is \$25.00 per person plus applicable taxes. Reservations are available for the nights of Saturday October 25<sup>th</sup> through Tuesday October 28<sup>th</sup> with a check-out Wednesday October 29, 2025.

**Reservations on Line:** <https://book.passkey.com/go/WELCOMENDBHMTG>

**Reservations by Phone: 1-800-431-8634. Please ask for the NDBH or National Dialogues on Behavioral Health Conference Rate. The cut-off Date for the NDBH Special Rate: Friday, October 3, 2025.**

**Hotel Parking: Short-Term 0 – 8 hours: \$18.00 (plus tax); Long-Term/Overnight: \$47.00 (plus tax)**

***The conference site meets ADA requirements and has put expanded cleaning protocols in place. Please contact the Renaissance Hotel and/or check the Hotel website for more information.***

## **National Dialogues on Behavioral Health Executive Board**

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| <b><i>Vijay Ganju, Ph.D. (Texas)</i></b><br>NDBH President<br>President and Chief Executive Officer<br>Behavioral Health Knowledge Management  | <b><i>Kelly Breland (Mississippi)</i></b><br>NDBH Board Co-Treasurer<br>Chief Financial Officer<br>Mississippi Department of Mental Health                  |
| <b><i>Jacqueline A. Fleming, LCSW (Mississippi)</i></b><br>NDBH Co-Treasurer<br>Consultant   | <b><i>Deborah Westvold, LISW (Iowa)</i></b><br>NDBH Secretary<br>Consultant   |
| <b><i>Jonah Cunningham (District of Columbia)</i></b><br>Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director<br>National Assn of County Behavioral Health and Disability Directors; National Assn for Rural Mental Health                            | <b><i>Rosanna DiChiro, Psy.D. (Louisiana)</i></b><br>Executive Director<br>Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority  |
| <b><i>Brian M. Hepburn, M.D. (Virginia)</i></b><br>Executive Director<br>National Assn of State Mental Health Program Directors  | <b><i>Meighan B. Haupt (Virginia)</i></b><br>Chief of Staff<br>National Assn of State Mental Health Program Directors                                       |
| <b><i>Debra Kupfer, MHS (Colorado)</i></b><br>Consultant<br>Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Behavioral Health Program   | <b><i>Melanie Norwood, M.S, LPC (Mississippi)</i></b><br>Psychologist I<br>Mississippi State Hospital   |
| <b><i>Stephen W. Phillippi Jr., Ph.D., LCSW, CCFC (Louisiana)</i></b><br>Program Chair- Community Health Science & Policy at the Louisiana State University School of Public Health  | <b><i>Carrie Slatton-Hodges (Virginia)</i></b><br>Executive Director – National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Research Institute     |
| <b><i>Mary E. Smith, Ph.D. (Illinois)</i></b><br>Senior Policy Analyst; Consultant<br>The Behavioral Health Crisis Hub@<br>The Center for Social Policy and Research<br>Jane Addams College of Social Work<br>University of Illinois Chicago | <b><i>Vanessa Roup MPH (Colorado)</i></b><br>Technical Assistance Associate<br>Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Behavioral Health Program |



*Be sure to check our website at  
<https://nationaldialoguesbh.org> for updates*



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*National Dialogues on Behavioral Health (formerly the Southern Regional Conference on Mental Health Statistics) is one of the longest running mental health conferences convened annually in the United States!*