

Nov 13, 2025

Behavioral Health Advisory Council Meeting

Attended Thompson, Michele (WYVA Teacher) Jim Cowser ridobe63@gmail.com
C. I. Chavez Dustin Brown kcastaneda@bhfs.com Erica Mathews Christin Covello
Jessi Westling shermerc@charter.net Cassie Crumpton Shea Ward
andi@wamhsac.com dmsedey@hotmail.com rebecca.j.reeves@outlook.com
April Thompson lanamahoney recoverwyoming.org Amanda Bialas
covello@uwyo.edu Cherie Brantley Taylor Stokes Ben Kifer Caitlin Lyle
Samantha Robbins Sheryl Foland Ashli Carrafa rebecca.reeves2@uhsinc.com
zerklejillian@gmail.com Kristie Gordy Rebecca Rimel brentwvr@gmail.com
Wayne Graves legal@wypanda.com Rhianna Brand theresaclare2007@gmail.com
nate@betterwyo.org

Attachments  Behavioral Health Advisory Council Meeting

Meeting records  Transcript

Summary

Jessi Westling welcomed new members Teresa Reeves and Ashley Karafa, and the Behavioral Health Advisory Council approved the August meeting minutes after a motion by April Thompson and a second by Christin Covello. Nate Martin, Executive Director of Better Wyoming, explained the legislative budget session process and warned about potential cuts to the Department of Health's budget, which could impact mental health services. The council approved updates to the bylaws, including the shift to virtual meetings, after a motion by Cassie Kmpton of Sublette County Treatment Court and a second by Shay from NAMI Wyoming, and subsequently elected Jim Cowser as the new Chair, April Thompson as Vice Chair, and Shay Ward as the new Membership Representative.

Details

- **Meeting Logistics and Introductions** Jessi Westling called the Behavioral Health Advisory Council to order and noted that a quorum was met for the officer voting ([00:00:00](#)). Jessi Westling welcomed two new members: Teresa Reeves, an advocate from Nrona County, and Ashley Karafa, a parent or family member from Park County ([00:06:27](#)). Michele Thompson-OTRLMEd, the membership chair, confirmed attendance and identified participants listed under Sublet County as Cassie Kmpton of the Sublette County Treatment Court and Lana Mahoney from Recover Wyoming ([00:07:40](#)).
- **Approval of August Meeting Minutes** Jessi Westling asked for any updates or edits to the August meeting minutes, which were posted on the council's website. Since no edits were suggested, April Thompson made a motion to approve the minutes, and Christin Covello seconded the motion ([00:08:58](#)).
- **Presentation by Better Wyoming** Jessi Westling introduced Nate Martin, Executive Director of Better Wyoming, who was invited to speak with the assistance of Better Wyoming employee and council member Ivon Chavez Medina ([00:08:58](#)). Nate Martin apologized for not having a visual presentation and explained that Better Wyoming focuses on civic education, leadership development, and collective action to empower people to participate in civic processes at the local and state levels. He noted that their work pertains to mental health and affordable healthcare access in Wyoming ([00:10:19](#)) ([00:13:13](#)).
- **Understanding the Legislative Budget Session** Nate Martin provided a detailed explanation of the two-year budget session process, which begins in February. He outlined that the governor first consults with state agencies, like the Department of Health, to gather their funding requests and then crafts their own budget, considering political realities and revenue projections ([00:18:21](#)). The governor's budget is then reviewed by the Joint Appropriations Committee, which amends it before sending it to the House and Senate for further amendment and reconciliation, and finally, the governor has line-item veto power which can be overridden by the legislature ([00:20:54](#)).
- **Concerns Regarding the Department of Health Budget** Nate Martin shared that Better Wyoming is closely monitoring the upcoming 2026 budget session, noting that members of the Freedom Caucus are seeking to cut \$300 million from the Department of Health's budget, potentially to pre-COVID levels ([00:25:20](#)). Nate

Martin warned that such cuts, like removing dental from Medicaid, would certainly impact mental health services ([00:26:49](#)). He also highlighted the distinct possibility of a legislative stalemate, as occurred in the previous year with the supplemental budget, which could lead to an uncharted constitutional contingency regarding the budget ([00:28:05](#)).

- **Resources for Legislative Information on Mental Health** Rebecca Rimel asked for resources advocating for mental health priorities in the budget. Nate Martin suggested contacting NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), Whamsack (Wyoming Association for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers), and the Wyoming Counseling Association for information ([00:31:29](#)). Shay from NAMI Wyoming confirmed that the Wyoming Counseling Association and the Behavioral Health Alliance are good sources of information ([00:32:43](#)).
- **Block Grant Reporting Update** Taylor Stokes informed the council that the required year-end block grant reporting is in process and will be submitted the following week, ahead of the December 1st deadline and their upcoming vacation ([00:35:02](#)).
- **Bylaws Review and Updates** Jessi Westling led a review of the bylaws, which had not been updated since August 2019 ([00:36:08](#)). Key changes included updating the title of a state agency administrator in the voting membership section. The bylaws were also updated to combine the two WAMSAC member designations into one, reflecting that the centers serve both mental health and substance abuse populations ([00:37:32](#)). Furthermore, a section referencing tribal representation was removed due to an executive order regarding the removal of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) ([00:38:46](#)).
- **Updates to Officer Terms and Membership Representative Role** The council reviewed the duties of the Chair and Vice Chair, which include setting the agenda and facilitating business ([00:40:29](#)). The bylaws were updated to state that the Chair and Vice Chair shall serve no more than two consecutive terms, "unless there is no other council member willing to take on the role," which was approved by the governor's office ([00:41:58](#)). Jessi Westling also explained that the Membership Chair monitors attendance and coordinates with the governor's office regarding unexcused absences and membership standards ([00:43:15](#)).
- **Bylaws Approval and Meeting Location Update** A final change in the bylaws was the shift to virtual council meetings, due to budget constraints on travel expenses and the success of virtual meetings ([00:44:29](#)). A physical location may still be

scheduled for special purposes. Following the review, Cassie Kmpton of Sublette County Treatment Court moved to approve the new bylaws, and Shay from NAMI Wyoming seconded the motion ([00:45:44](#)).

- **Officer Elections: Chair and Vice Chair** The council proceeded with officer elections, where Shay clarified that the terms are for one year and the council continues regardless of a change in governor ([00:48:30](#)). Jim Cowser was nominated and seconded for the position of Chair ([00:49:18](#)). Following a vote, Jim Cowser was elected as the new Chair of the council ([00:50:33](#)). April Thompson was nominated for Vice Chair ([00:49:18](#)). Brent Weaver declined a nomination for Vice Chair. April Thompson was then voted in as the new Vice Chair ([00:51:51](#)).
- **Election of Membership Representative** Michele Thompson-OTRLMEd declined to continue as the Membership Chair due to focusing their efforts on education advocacy. Jim Cowser nominated Shay Ward for the Membership Representative position ([00:53:05](#)). Shay accepted the nomination after clarifying the role, which primarily involves monitoring attendance and working with Taylor Stokes and the governor's office on membership tracking. Shay Ward was elected as the new Membership Representative ([00:54:20](#)) ([00:56:15](#)).
- **Open Discussion and Announcements** Shay Ward announced their return to NAMI Wyoming, where they are working on rebuilding mental health education and support tools ([00:57:39](#)). April Thompson shared that November 22nd is National Suicide Survivors Day, and events are planned throughout the state, often organized by local coalitions ([00:59:00](#)).
- **Upcoming Events and Announcements** April Thompson shared an upcoming event on November 22nd. Recover Wyoming announced a chili and bingo night, which is a recovery and family-friendly activity geared towards the recovery community, scheduled for November 19th from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the recovery center, starting with a short all-recovery meeting ([01:00:19](#)).
- **Positive Feedback for NAMI Wyoming** Brent Weaver provided positive feedback on NAMI Wyoming, specifically mentioning the groups they have put on in Sheridan, noting that patients have been giving positive feedback and engaging in those groups. NAMI Wyoming was pleased to hear this and stated that the NAMI Sheridan group is doing incredible work, with NAMI Wyoming planning to share the positive feedback with them ([01:02:17](#)).

- **Jessi Westling's Reflections and Transition** Jessi Westling expressed gratitude to Sherry Mercer for the belated birthday wishes, mentioning that they took the day off since their birthday was on a Friday. Jessi Westling also shared their enjoyment of being on the council and their intention to continue if reappointed by the governor, adding that they are excited to hand the torch over to Jim, whom they believe will do a wonderful job ([01:01:10](#)).
- **Meeting Adjournment** The meeting concluded with a motion to adjourn made by Sherry Mercer and seconded by Jim. Jessi Westling wished everyone a wonderful rest of their day and mentioned they would be in touch with the new officers ([01:02:17](#)).

Suggested next steps

- Jessi Westling will coordinate a virtual meeting for Jim, April Thompson, and Shay Ward to go over the different responsibilities of their new roles and pass off all papers and spreadsheets to Shay Ward.
- NAMI Wyoming will share the positive feedback from patients in Sheridan with Nami Sheridan.

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