Aug 7, 2026

Behavioral Health Advisory Council Meeting

Summary

The council reviewed grant applications, evaluated recovery initiatives, and clarified advisory scope for future legislative engagement.

Grant and Project Reviews
The council confirmed the annual mental health block grant application entails no significant changes. Recover Wyoming introduced new peer support initiatives including discharge inreach services and universal guidance development.

Events and Scope Clarification
Members discussed overlapping suicide and youth mental health symposia scheduled for the fall. The group formally clarified its role regarding behavioral health funding oversight and legislative policy influence.

Meeting Format Improvements
The council decided to implement topic-based prompts to foster more intentional dialogue. Members agreed to receive advanced email reminders to share specific successes or challenges during future sessions.

Details

- **Meeting Opening and Approval of Minutes**: Jim Cowser called the meeting to order, and the council formally approved the minutes from the previous

session following a motion by Recover Wyoming that was seconded by NAMI Wyoming (00:00:04).

- **Member Introductions**: The council conducted introductions to welcome four new members, with participants identifying their names, professional roles, and locations within the state. Participants included Jim Cowser (Chair), Amanda Bialas (Vocational Rehabilitation), April Thompson (Housing Authority), Ashli Carrafa (Family member), Ben Kifer (Behavioral Health Division), Caitlin Lyle (Wyoming Department of Corrections), Christin Covello (Counselor), Dustin Brown (Ordis Foundation), Janae Harman (Provider), Kelly Addington (State of Wyoming representative), Jacqueline Fales (Park County Treatment Court), Steve Moehr (Blue Cross Blue Shield), Carlos BERSABE (Moral injury specialist), Rhianna Brand (Survivor of suicide loss), Rebecca Reeves (Family member), and Alaria Schnase (Wyoming Department of Family Services) (00:01:26) (00:11:48).
- **Block Grant Application Review**: Taylor Stokes, the council administrator, facilitated a review of the annual mental health and substance abuse block grant application. Taylor Stokes noted that this year's document is a "mini application" and contains no significant changes or surprises compared to previous submissions. The council discussed that the majority of these grant funds are distributed through treatment contracts to behavioral health centers across the state (00:07:39) (00:10:34).
- **Recover Wyoming Project Updates**: Recover Wyoming presented two new initiatives, beginning with an inreach project designed to connect individuals in inpatient treatment with telephone recovery support services approximately 30 days prior to their discharge (00:12:50). To support this, they plan to conduct training sessions in the fall to rebuild their pool of peer specialist volunteers (00:14:24). The second initiative involves collaborating with the Behavioral Health Division and various stakeholders to develop a universal scope of practice and guidance document for peer specialists in the state (00:15:39).
- **Upcoming Symposia and Mental Health Events**: Dustin Brown announced two upcoming events: the Wyoming Suicide Symposium, scheduled for September 15th to 16th in Cheyenne, and the Ordis Foundation Symposium for Youth Mental Health, occurring October 7th to 8th in Jackson Hole (00:16:48). NAMI Wyoming and Dustin Brown discussed an event organized by the Western Governors' Association, which is scheduled for October 8th to 9th in Jackson

(00:17:51). The group noted the potential for these events to overlap, which could create synergy and reduce travel costs for attendees (00:18:54).

- **Council Scope and Role Clarification**: Alaria Schnase requested information regarding the advisory group's scope and the role of the Department of Family Services within it. Jim Cowser explained that the council provides oversight for behavioral health funding, supports youth and families, and offers a platform for community members and providers to address policy challenges that may be taken to the legislature (00:20:18). Dustin Brown added that the group fulfills statutory requirements for the block grant funding model and serves as a forum to influence policy-level changes for Wyoming families (00:21:26).
- **Future Meeting Improvements**: To foster more intentional dialogue during meetings, Jim Cowser proposed implementing topic-based prompts and sending email reminders one week in advance to encourage members to share successes, challenges, or relevant events (00:22:38). Members expressed support for this approach, suggesting that identifying specific perspectives or stories related to their roles could enhance the value of the feedback provided during discussions (00:23:54).
- **Adjournment**: The meeting concluded with a motion to adjourn made by April Thompson and seconded by Dustin Brown (00:25:13).