



December 1, 2022
Zoom Meeting
9:30am- 11:00am

Minutes

Attendees

- Adrienne Cassidy, Advocates (co-chair)
- Andrea Muther, Eliot Community Human Services
- Brent Rourke, Department of Mental Health Northeast Area office
- Cecilia Woodworth, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Celeste Clerk, Department of Mental Health Western Mass office
- Chris Zabik, Department of Mental Health Western Mass office
- Cristaliz Arroyo
- Crystal Kozlowski, Open Sky Community Services
- Destiny O'Connell
- Gary Comeau, Department of Mental Health Central Area office
- Heidi Holland, Department of Mental Health Central Office
- Janet Marsden, Department of Mental Health Central Office
- Jenifer Urff, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
- Jess Larochelle, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
- Jill Gichuhi, NAMI Massachusetts
- Joe Vallely, Department of Mental Health Central Office
- Joel Deery, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Jonathan Bowen-Leopold, Department of Mental Health Central Office
- Kate Alicante, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
- Linda McMahon, Mass Housing
- Monica Luke, Living Assistance Fund
- Nancy Coulter, Advocates
- Stephanie Kan, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Tom Timms, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Yuka Gordon, Metro Boston Recovery Learning Community

I. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair Adrienne Cassidy called the meeting to order. Adrienne welcomed everyone to the meeting. The meeting agenda for this meeting and meeting minutes from the September 22, 2022 meeting were made available to the group in advance.

II. Review of minutes from 9/22/2022

Adrienne asked for a motion to accept the Minutes from September 22, 2022. Jenifer Urff made the motion and Celeste Clerk seconded. The September minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

III. NAMI Compass

Jill Gichuhi, director of the Compass Helpline at NAMI Massachusetts, provided an overview of housing-related inquiries they have received over the past 6 months:

- housing was the sole thing that people reached out for 24% of their inquiries
- housing was one of the primary topics for another 22%
- people reached out about a variety of topics related to housing
- this included people looking for housing (people inpatient waiting to be discharged and people who are currently unhoused)
- most self-report being in higher need of support but were not receiving support from DMH, were on the wait lists for public and subsidized housing, had care management, and were getting help with housing through common sources (HCECs and community action programs)
- people who have vouchers or RAFT but cannot find a place that will accept it - typically people report bad credit as being a contributing factor
- also people who have found housing, but need help with paying first/last/security
- many people reached out about housing for a family member who lives with them, and the situation is volatile
- the Helpline also received inquiries about issues with housing, including people being evicted - the Helpline has seen a large jump in these inquiries
- many are reached out about being evicted for non-payment of rent or because of a manifestation of their or a family member's mental health condition

Jill shared the opinion that there is not much of a housing safety net in Massachusetts, aside from shelters and that many of the programs that do exist to help people navigate are overburdened and not well equipped to support people dealing with significant mental health symptoms in a way that is helpful to that person.

Crystal Kozlowski noted that Open Sky Community Services will be opening two 24/7 shelters, in Worcester and Southbridge, in the near future. They are currently trying to find locations.

IV. DMHRSP Forums

Stephanie Kan from the Department of Housing and Community Development noted that they are holding feedback sessions about the DMH Rental Subsidy Program. She reminded attendees that this program is a collaboration between DMH and DHCD. There was a revamp to the program in 2019. They are now speaking with people to get feedback. The COVID pandemic also created a lot of change, so this is a good time to ask for feedback.

DHCD is going with a three-tiered plan

1. Online survey to AAs (LHAs and RHAs), services providers, and DMH staff - 105 out of 375 responded with this written feedback
2. Open forums in December with the same groups of stakeholders, with breakout groups for each stakeholder group

3. In January small focus groups according to the topics that have come up in earlier sessions

Jill asked if there is a plan to get feedback from people who are using the voucher program. Stephanie responded that there are currently doing this via provider agencies. There is a plan to hold public feedback sessions later on, and anyone who wants to provide feedback can join at that time.

Joe Vallely shared that he saw the need for a forum to get feedback from people who are served by the voucher, and should think about how to do this. Adrienne stated that anything that can make this program easier to use would be useful.

Jess Larochelle asked if the invitation be sent to Subcommittee members, to get people who may have missed the survey invitation. Stephanie responded that they have a plan to look at the list of people who did not respond to the survey to reach out again.

V. Peer Supporters & Housing

Celeste Clerk from the Department of Mental Health Western Mass office provided an update on the Peer Supporters & Housing workgroup. This group began meeting in 2019. Members have included folks from DMH, people working in peer support and housing specialist roles, and others. The group is currently planning two regional conferences, with panels of speakers that include people representing regional, intersectional perspectives.

The first conference will happen on Tuesday January 17, 2023. It will feature a keynote and Central and Western Mass regional panel presentations. The keynote will feature a panel of people talking about their personal experience with the housing and related systems, to set the tone for the day. For the regional panels, panelists will be asked a series of quests and audience members will be invited to interact with panels. The hope is that people will be able to network and connect, and that some attendees will want to join the workgroup.

Jenifer Urff noted that, although the panels are regional, the event will be virtual and anyone is welcome to attend and participate. An event focusing on the other regions will follow.

Heidi Holland asked if there is an opportunity to involve young adults in these panels. Celeste said yes, and offered to meet with Heidi to discuss this.

VI. Housing Conference & Advocacy Updates

Jess Larochelle from the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health provided an advocacy update. She noted that there are two advocacy opportunities coming up.

The governor and legislature recent signed a \$3.8 billion package. We are trying to channel as much of this as we can towards housing. There is \$25 million for people with substance use who are unhoused. We will be drafting a letter to the administration asking for some of this money to be used for Safe Havens beds.

The Healey administration will drop their FY24 budget at the end of January. We would like to work to get more money for the DMHRSP. We are working on coming up with a specific ask for this. A small group have been meeting to talk about how we can influence policy makers and developers to create more housing opportunities. We will be developing a paper that documents the need for housing for

people with mental health conditions, and we'd like to include real data from different sources. We'd also like to include some new ideas from the administration for leasing, producing housing, services and supports. We have an outline that we are fine tuning. This is new leadership, and we want them to prioritize housing. Once this paper is completed, we want to have a conference.

Joe noted that this past year we had the opportunity to review when DHCD put out their "winter round" of tax credits. There are 13 projects representing about 54 units of housing slated for DMH. This is a good deal more than past years.

Linda McMahon noted that the vouchers have been helpful for people trying to use the set-aside units. Adrienne noted that the flexibility with the voucher has been helpful, including using them as tenant-based vouchers. Brent Rourke thanked Jess and others for the advocating work, especially with the Safe Havens. More low-threshold, supportive housing is a great need.

Yuka Gordon noted that they've been supporting many people who are unhoused at the Metro Boston Recovery Learning Community. They are feeling frustrated that many people are taking advantage of housing programs, including people using Section 8 who have some not on the lease living with them or people living in shelters who do not need to.

VII. Young Adults & Housing

Joe Valley from Department of Mental Health Central Office provided some context. Discussions about housing young adults started with DHCD, who invited DMH to present information about how they may collaborate around supporting young adults.

Heidi Holland, also from the Department of Mental Health Central Office, noted that there are at least 1000 young people unhoused on any given night in Massachusetts. We know that there has been an increase in young people struggling with mental health symptoms in the past few years and more young adults applying for DMH services.

DMH has two programs that offer support for young people: young people served by ACCS and intensive community services for young adults that includes an outreach and engagement specialist.

There is a community model called More Than Words that supports young people involved with different service systems. It provides job coaching, life coaching, and more. They have also developed their own SRO opportunity for young people.

These are some of the ideas that we have found to be successful for young adults. We have also tried roommate situations, but this has not gone as well. We've instead been looking at studio apartments in buildings with support, or are adjacent to young adult access centers. When people have been successful in these environments, many have moved on to other DMH supports.

We know there is an unmet need for young adults. Getting services can be a challenge. We are trying to create low-barrier services through the Young Adult Access Centers. There are 10 YAACs statewide, each staffed by young adult peer mentors. We don't have enough in the housing realm that reflects this kind of model.

Adrienne asked what can we be doing as a community to support this. Heidi responded that ongoing feedback and the opportunity to hear what is going on around the state is helpful. She asked for the

group to be mindful of the developmental side. She noted that young adults are not, by and large, applying for DMH services so we need to think creatively about what we need to do to meet their needs. The Commission for Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth would be a great connection and it will be great to get them involved.

The meeting ended at 11:02 am

Next Meeting. Date: Tentative: Thursday, January 26 at 9:30am

minutes taken by Jill Gichuhi, NAMI Massachusetts