

# Behavioral Health Planning Council

## Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 20, 2026  
2:30 PM–3:30 PM CT (adjourned at 3:38 PM)  
Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

### Attendance:

**Members present:** Tania Zerr, Andrea Hochhalter, Rich Smith, Melanie Gaebe

**Members Absent:** Kurt Snyder

**Others present:** Monica Haugen, DHHS; Janell Regimbal, Insight to Solutions, BHPC Facilitator; and guests Erin Levitin, Jillian Salmon, and Erin Moore, all of Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services.

**Welcome and Call to Order** Tania Zerr, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM CT. Roll call confirmed a quorum.

### Agenda Approval – February 20, 2026

**Motion by** Andrea Hochhalter, second by Melanie Gaebe to approve the February 20, 2026, agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

### Approval of Past Meeting Minutes – January 21, 2026

**Motion by** Andrea Hochhalter, second by Rich Smith to approve the January 21, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

## BHPC Advocacy Issues

### Cross Disability Waiver — Joined by members of the Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services team

The Executive Committee welcomed the Alvarez & Marsal (A&M) Public Sector Services team to discuss BHPC concerns and observations related to North Dakota's ongoing cross-disability waiver planning process. Janell Regimbal provided brief context that BHPC discussion in December raised the possibility of BHPC issuing a position statement and/or engaging through public comment during the waiver design period, and that the purpose of this meeting was to provide BHPC feedback early and proactively while the waiver work remains in the planning phase.

## **Key themes communicated by BHPC Executive Committee**

BHPC Executive Committee members discussed recurring barriers they hear from families, and emphasized the Council's interest in ensuring the waiver design reduces system fragmentation and improves navigation for families whose needs span developmental disability and behavioral health systems. Major points included:

### **1) Eligibility and financial barriers for children and families**

Members described concerns that eligibility rules—particularly those that consider **parent income**—can result in children being excluded from needed services even when families are “barely making ends meet.” Members emphasized that varying eligibility criteria across programs creates confusion, contributes to delays, and can lead families to disengage because the process is too complex. The Committee characterized this as both an eligibility challenge and a navigation challenge, noting families may attempt one access point, receive a denial, and never learn what other pathways or supports might be available.

In response, A&M asked BHPC to clarify which specific programs or entry points families are attempting to access, noting that programs differ in how parent income is considered and the applicable thresholds. BHPC members emphasized the broader pattern they see: families struggle to understand where to start and often lack coordinated guidance across programs with different rules.

### **2) Siloed systems, repeated intakes, and administrative burden**

Committee members stressed that families repeatedly have to re-tell their story and complete multiple intakes, often across disconnected systems. Members described intake and administrative processes as barriers in themselves, particularly after families have already endured long periods of distress. The Committee underscored that the lack of shared information and cross-system coordination increases burden and reduces follow-through, and that families experience the system as fragmented rather than integrated.

### **3) Screening and assessment tools—age appropriateness and fit across the lifespan**

BHPC members reiterated concerns that screening/assessment tools may not be appropriate across age groups and can score differently depending on the respondent or context. The Executive Committee emphasized that, for children and youth, tools must be developmentally appropriate and reflect differences between early childhood, school-age children, and adolescents. A&M shared that similar concerns have been raised in CDAC discussions and affirmed the importance of ensuring tools or guidance selected by the state work across the range of children served.

Committee members also highlighted “service gaps” that can emerge when eligibility categories or service models do not align with the age when a child can be identified or diagnosed, leaving periods of time where families have clear need but no accessible service pathway.

#### **4) Navigation supports and “no wrong door” expectations**

BHPC members described the period immediately following diagnosis as particularly overwhelming and stated that families often leave an appointment with a diagnosis but without clear next steps or coordinated support. Members discussed the value of structured navigation supports—comparing behavioral health navigation needs to other health systems where “nurse navigator” models exist to assist patients through complex processes. The Committee referenced North Dakota’s Aging and Disability Resource Link (ADRL) as an example of a “no wrong door” resource that has helped many individuals access services and suggested similar navigation supports could reduce confusion and improve follow-through for families.

It was also noted that transitions across the lifespan are consistently high-risk points for families falling between systems, including early childhood transitions and transitions from child to adult systems.

#### **Guidance from A&M on effective avenues for BHPC input**

The Executive Committee asked for guidance on the most helpful form of BHPC engagement (e.g., formal position statement, public comment, written submission). A&M advised:

- **CDAC quarterly in-person meetings** include a **dedicated 30-minute public comment period**, intentionally set aside to allow meaningful input from community members. A&M encouraged BHPC to use this venue to provide public comment.
- **Monthly CDAC meetings** are public and BHPC members are welcome to listen in; A&M indicated they are open to additional conversations as issues arise and collaboration needs are identified.
- If BHPC chooses to provide **formal written input** (position statement or comment), A&M noted there is a method for submitting input through the project website and welcomed a written statement if the Council decides that would be useful.

#### **A&M summary of current project phase and next steps**

A&M described the project as currently in the **planning/design phase**, working with CDAC to shape what should be included and how the program should operate. A&M explained that CDAC feedback is being summarized as **guiding principles**, to be posted publicly as the group formalizes recommendations. A&M noted that formal action to advance a waiver package would align with the **2027–2029 biennium**, with a package anticipated for consideration as part of the **January 2027** legislative session planning/budget development process. A&M also noted they are beginning to consider potential cost estimates for different design options as part of this work.

## Follow up from Special Legislative Session

Following the A&M discussion, the Executive Committee briefly discussed follow-up items from the special legislative session and related communications. The Committee noted that receiving responses and engagement—whether positive or negative—was valuable because it demonstrates the message was read and considered. Members thanked Chair Zerr for her outreach and noted that the exchange created an opportunity to clarify BHPC’s position in writing. Executive Committee members agreed it may be beneficial to consider inviting individuals who have had questions about the IMD Waiver position to a meeting so that continued education on the group’s position could be mutual and documented on the record. The facilitator indicated willingness to coordinate any invitation/outreach at the facilitator level and reminded we can always direct partis to our public comment time at each meeting.

## BHPC Review Function Follow-Up Discussion/Implications for Future Agenda Development

Regimbal summarized themes heard in December, including a desire for clearer distinction between compliance oversight and strategic oversight, interest in earlier engagement in planning cycles, and feedback that meetings can be overly report- and PowerPoint-driven with insufficient time for discussion and action. It was also noted there may be inconsistent understanding regarding which entities are expected to report to BHPC and how frequently, indicating she had followed prior guidance but had also heard differing views and would seek clarification so meeting planning aligns with accurate expectations.

### Executive Committee discussion: meeting structure, expectations, and participation

Executive Committee members discussed ways to make meetings more discussion-oriented while maintaining productive, solution-focused structure appropriate for BHPC’s role:

- **Reduce “slide-reading,” increase synthesized reporting:** Members expressed that slide decks often repeat information that could be reviewed independently. The Committee preferred **advance written summaries** (or concise reports) and use of live meeting time for discussion, questions, and decision-making.
- **Ensure lived experience input is structured and solution-oriented:** Members supported greater incorporation of lived experience but emphasized the importance of clear expectations so meetings do not become purely complaint forums without constructive outcomes. The Committee discussed providing **structure or a template** in advance (e.g., guiding questions) to help invited speakers frame issues and potential solutions.
- **Improve engagement norms:** Members noted participation challenges in virtual meetings, including limited camera use and uncertainty about attendee

engagement. The Committee discussed possible “standards of practice” to encourage engagement (e.g., expectations around participation and visibility) while recognizing accessibility and practical constraints.

- **Request more meaningful “progress + gaps” reporting:** Members identified Monica Haugen’s earlier “progress and gaps” framing as a helpful model and suggested requesting similar reporting approaches—focused on what has changed, what is working, what gaps remain, and what decisions or advocacy needs are emerging—rather than data-heavy slides without context.

### **April 2026 quarterly meeting planning lens (children’s topics with a different approach)**

Janell outlined draft planning for the April quarterly BHPC meeting, noting prior intent to focus on children’s behavioral health, including crisis services, children’s levels of care changes (QRTP/PRTF transition), assessment and eligibility difficulties for families, and early childhood mental health. She added that Senator Hogan and the Children’s Cabinet work (particularly related to children with complex needs) had been considered as a potential agenda component to better understand intersections between BHPC’s role and the Cabinet’s work. Janell asked for direction on how to keep the children’s focus while shifting to a more discussion-driven and action-oriented format.

It was also pointed out the importance of preparing for fiscal constraints anticipated in future sessions and suggested BHPC may need to better understand program utilization and service impacts so the Council can be thoughtful about prioritization when funding decisions tighten. Members acknowledged the value of education for both incoming and continuing legislators and discussed the importance of proactive outreach and clear messaging as legislative turnover increases.

### **Scheduling next Executive Committee meeting**

The Executive Committee identified the next Executive Committee meeting date and time to support timely April agenda development with the consensus being to meet **Monday, March 2, 2026, 1:00–2:00 PM CT**, with the primary purpose of brainstorming and refining the April BHPC meeting agenda.

### **3:38 PM — Adjourn**

Chair Zerr adjourned the meeting at **3:38 PM CT**. No motion to adjourn was recorded.