

ST. JOHNS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL (HHSAC)
MEETING MINUTES
April 3rd, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Howard Hitzel, Vice Chair; Deanna Jones; Chip Cover; Leslie Barstow; Kathleen Patneau; Shannon Nazworth

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tara Haley, Chair

STAFF PRESENT: Shawna Novak, HHS Director; Joe Cone, HHS Assistant Director; Juliette Maronel, HHS Admin Coordinator; Tracy Dillon, Social Services Manager; Katrina Tanner, HHS Contract Coordinator; Commissioner Sarah Arnold, BCC Liaison

VISITORS: Nangy Pulsfus, Michelle Colee, Christina Embry, Joe Siegfried, Leslie Waller, Kristine King, Tara Boatwright, Daniel Dilallo (Public Comment)

Virtual- Anita Daniels, Tara Wildes, Chynequa King, Judy Dembowski, Sara Rutan, Kelly Franklin, Carol Schnider, Brittany Spangler, Inez Stich Peel, Tiffany Mariotti, Nancy Russo, Debi Redding

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL: Howard Hitzel called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Quorum was present.

MINUTES: Howard Hitzel opened the floor for a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes (March 6th General & March 20th Executive). Chip Cover motioned to approve meeting minutes. Commissioner Sarah Arnold seconded the motion; the minutes are approved unanimously by the Council.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Howard opened the floor for public comment, and Daniel Dilallo introduced himself, seeking information about Mosquito Control, specifically whether aerial spraying was occurring and what the schedules were. Shawna Novak clarified that Anastasia Mosquito Control operates independently with its own elected board and recommended contacting them directly. Daniel stated his intent to attend their meetings for further insight.

REPORT FROM COMMISSIONER ARNOLD: Commissioner Sarah Arnold mentioned there's been some drastic movements and changes with state and federal level regarding funding for different programs, nonprofits, etc. She is meeting with our delegation and other representatives next week in Tallahassee, and meeting with delegation in DC the second week in May. If any individual organization or partner agencies have requests, they need following up on she can speak on to help advocate, please email Comm. Arnold.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Continuum of Care (CoC) Update from Anita Daniel:
 - The three-year DCF contract is still pending.
 - A new HMIS coordinator, Hannah Evans, has joined.
 - Attendance was encouraged for the annual meeting on Wednesday the 9th, at HHS Muscovy and Osprey. Registration is required and available on their website: www.stjohnscountycoc.org. The PIT will be presented, but Hannah is available to present at any time.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. RFP Application Review
 - The council reviewed the RFP application, set to be posted to the SJC website HHS page on 4/21. Discussions focused on navigation and usability improvements following platform migration. While content remains unchanged, formatting and accessibility have been enhanced, making the application more user-friendly.

- Howard opened the floor for a vote from the council, asking if there were any objections, but none were raised. The RFP application and posting on 4/21 was approved unanimously by the council.

2. Wildflower Healthcare

- Michelle Colee, Executive Director of Wildflower Healthcare, introduced the clinic as the only free healthcare provider in St. Johns County, offering medical, dental, vision, hearing, and prenatal care. She shared that the clinic is expanding eligibility to those at 300% of the poverty level due to Medicaid policy changes, increasing demand significantly. Space constraints remain a challenge, particularly for dental services.
- Michelle highlighted a success story of a cancer patient treated through their services and noted partnerships with the Plus Bus and UF Health's mobile unit for weekly medical care. She provided updates on their prenatal and OB-GYN clinics, proudly noting that four babies have been born under their care so far. She also discussed the new medical center under construction in West Augustine, where Wildflower Healthcare will collaborate with EPIC and UF Health, with funding nearly complete.
- The clinic's dental waiting list includes 500 residents, particularly seniors lacking coverage under Medicare Part D. They have streamlined services to offer comprehensive care, including dentures and extractions, but still face post-pandemic challenges due to volunteer shortages.
- Michelle thanked the community for its support and shared that she and Christina Embry, Clinical Manager, recently traveled to Tallahassee to advocate for the human services budget.

3. EPIC Behavioral Healthcare

- Nangy Pulsfus introduced Joe Siegfried and Leslie Waller to discuss their crisis response roles, highlighting similarities while noting key differences in their responsibilities.
- Joe, a clinician with the Rapid Response Team (MRT), focuses on reducing the burden on officers and other community partners, by responding to mental health crises outside law enforcement. The MRT is linked to the 988-suicide crisis hotline, ensuring responses within 60 minutes in St. Johns County, and as quickly as possible in surrounding areas. They primarily serve adults 26+, while SAYS handles youth cases. Beyond crisis response, MRT provides peer support to prevent hospitalization and incarceration while connecting individuals with vital services. They collaborate with external agencies like Duval County for program coordination and transport.
- Leslie, a highly trained clinician embedded within law enforcement, co-responds to crisis calls, providing specialized support across various situations, including suicide prevention, substance abuse, dementia, and homelessness. She works to break cycles of repeated emergencies by addressing root causes and ensuring long-term stability. She emphasized the importance of community collaboration, sharing examples of connecting vulnerable individuals with needed resources. Leslie also follows up with past clients to ensure ongoing support. While both teams collaborate, Leslie is often dispatched into higher-risk environments, such as homes with firearms, domestic disputes, or volatile situations where standard MRT protocols would not apply.

Health & Human Services/County Administration Update- Shawna Novak, Director, Health & Human Services

1. Budget Discussion

- Shawna reviewed last month's budget discussions, highlighting the need to prepare both a normal budget and one with a rollback rate. The budget is due tomorrow, after which the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will review and adjust as needed. Shawna confirmed that the rollback rate applies to both Independent Agency (IA) funding and departments.
- Shawna maintained similar department budgets programs but requested an additional \$750,000 for IA funding, bringing the total request to \$3.3 million, citing federal and state uncertainty. She emphasized the importance of IA programs in sustaining community quality of life but acknowledged approval remains uncertain. To support informed decision-making, she urged IA-funded agencies to provide data on last years' service numbers and the potential impact of federal cuts, as some programs face possible elimination.

- Shawna provided a brief overview of the Budget Process Timeline, noting in September, two required public meetings will be held to finalize and adopt the budget, during which commissioners will decide whether to proceed with the rollback rate.
- Commissioner Arnold encouraged IA and board members to meet with commissioners individually and urged agencies to invite them for site visits to demonstrate community impact. She emphasized the importance of advocacy, recommending council members engage through emails, meetings, and personal connections to highlight how funding decisions affect real people.

2. RFP Timeline Presentation by Katrina Tanner

- With 2025 data unavailable, previous assessment findings guided FY26 funding priorities. The 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment, approved by Flagler Health+ on August 24, 2023, identified key unmet needs. Funding for FY26 will follow the same priorities as FY25, focusing on (1) community healthcare, including aging services, (2) affordable housing and homelessness, and (3) employment opportunities, recognizing the link between housing stability and job access.
- Katrina provided an overview of the RFP Process Timeline, covering key dates for applications, question deadlines, score announcements, and funding recommendations, which are pending budget approval.

Funded Agency Updates:

Early Learning Coalition (ELC): Brittany Spangler introduced herself as the Assistant Vice President of Episcopal Children's Services, which is the contractor entity for the North Florida Coalition. She shared that they are currently enrolling children of all ages, including school-age students. The state recently transitioned to a more secure statewide system, which has resulted in some technical issues. A link is available as a pop-up on their main website, ecs4kids.org, providing guidance for families and childcare providers on accessing their accounts, or call them directly for assistance.

Good Samaritan/Wildflower Clinic: Michelle Colee mentioned their program includes free blood pressure monitoring at COAs, support for the homeless through partnerships with Home Again and St. Francis, and the providing of dental and medical care. Additionally, they distribute free first aid kits at all their events and engage in street outreach, including visits to homeless camps.

Betty Griffin Center (BGC): Tiffany Mariotti introduced herself as the Residential Director and provided an update on recent services. Last month, the organization received 58 health line calls and served 325 survivors, including 231 adults and 94 children. Of those, 61 adults and 38 children stayed in the emergency shelter. She shared that their wait list is currently empty since expanding their master's-level internship program. Tiffany expressed gratitude to the county commissioners for allowing public recognition of their efforts and extended a special thank you to Commissioner Arnold for her remarks at the meeting, emphasizing the importance of recognizing this month in honor of community survivors.

St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS): Sara Rutan expressed appreciation for Leslie Waller and the co-responder team, emphasizing their collaboration in responding to crisis situations efficiently and ensuring children receive the necessary care beyond the immediate crisis. She mentioned the Community Action Team diverts approximately 98% of children from higher-cost care and the Coaches Program has maintained a 96% success rate, keeping children within the community and reducing costs from \$300–\$500 per day to just \$50 per day. Sara reported that the MRT program conducted 399 assessments, with an 85% diversion rate from Baker Act inpatient care. With each inpatient assessment costing approximately \$3,900, this diversion equates to around \$1.3 million in savings. Mr. Hitzel noted that combining financial data with human impact creates a compelling case for maintaining and expanding community-based services.

Council on Aging (COA): Brian Robinson highlighted Volunteer Appreciation Month and shared that all volunteers will be honored next week. He reported that there are currently 551 active volunteers who have contributed over 84,000 hours, with a monetary value of \$2.5 million if compensated for their work. He emphasized that without these dedicated volunteers, the organization would not be able to serve over 4,000 seniors annually.

St. Francis House (SFH): Judy Dembowski emphasized the impact of funding cuts on young residents, particularly those aged 18–24 transitioning out of care. Demand has pushed SFH program from 16 to 24 beds, with 32 youth stay nightly, with no room for expansion. Without funding, many would lose access to a safe place to stay. Currently, 86% of participants are employed, demonstrating their drive to build stable futures. The program also provides on-site mental health support tailored to those in homeless shelters in collaboration with Flagler Hospital, serving 100% of overnight residents and 45 individuals daily. The program also serves adults, with 27 individuals moving from SFH to permanent affordable housing in just one month. Two families are set to transition next week, with more in queue.

Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHC): Debi Redding presented a budget in February to her board, highlighting potential funding cuts that could make rental costs unaffordable for families. Commissioner Clay Murphy visited the campus today to learn about their services and funding concerns, joining all but one commissioner who has toured the facility. Despite financial uncertainty, the organization is moving forward with its planned expansion, picking up permits for Phase 1 tomorrow, with a groundbreaking planned for April. The project includes converting an office into a family home, creating an education center for children, and expanding facilities. Currently, 16 families are in permanent housing. A special acknowledgment was given to Wildflower Clinic, which recently helped a resident at the 405 House receive dentures after living with only one front tooth for over five years.

Epic Behavioral Healthcare: Nangy noted that there is still a lot of uncertainty and didn't have much to add beyond previous discussions. She thanked Shawna for her advocacy, acknowledged the tight funding situation, and emphasized their commitment to continuing efforts despite the challenges.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

SMA Healthcare: Nancy Russo stated there's no updates this month.

Department of Health: Since Shane Lockwood was unavailable, Shawna provided an update on his behalf. In partnership with HHS and DOH, a Mamava breastfeeding cubby is now available for clients to use. The first client utilized it yesterday and had a positive experience.

UF Health St. Johns: No representative present.

Public Safety: Director Tara Wildes praised Leslie and the co-responder team for their outstanding work. She noted that, while there is currently only one team, efforts are underway to establish a second team due to the high demand. Deputies on the road have embraced the program, with referrals occurring 2–4 times a day. She highlighted the team's increased communication with community partners and the successful connection to vital resources. Tara expressed appreciation for everyone involved in these efforts. She also shared that the department recently underwent its larger accreditation review, with a major focus this year on mental health. The accreditation team was highly impressed by the collaboration with community partners, taking extensive notes on their progressive approach to both criminal justice and social services.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Executive Meeting: Thursday, April 17th, at 3:30 p.m., in the Muscovy conference room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084 and via Microsoft Teams.

General Meeting: Thursday, May 1st, at 4pm in the Kingfisher conference room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084 and via Microsoft Teams.

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting was adjourned at 5:07 pm