

ST. JOHNS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL (HHSAC)
GENERAL MEETING MINUTES
December 4th, 2025

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Shannon Nazworth

STAFF PRESENT: Shawna Novak, HHS Director; Juliette Maronel, HHS Admin Coordinator; Katrina Tanner, HHS Contract Coordinator; Tracy Dillon, Social Services Manager

VISITORS: Dennis Maneja, Dawn Bell, Schuyler Siefker, Marion Blohm, Lana Sample, Kenice Taylor
Virtual- Suzanne Clulow, Anita Daniel, Brittany Spangler, Maria Pagan, Brian Robinson, Valeria Duquette, Nangela Pulsfus, Teresa Matheny, Chynequa King, Paige Stanton, Judy Dembrowski, Tara Wildes, Kelly Franklin, Candace Ray, Sara Vanik, Candace Ray

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL: Tara Haley called the meeting to order at 4:00pm. Quorum was present.

MINUTES: Tara Haley opened the floor for a motion to approve the meeting minutes for October 2nd, October 16th, November 6th, and November 20th. Howard Hitzel moved to approve the October 2nd and October 16th minutes, and Leslie Barstow seconded. Chip Cover moved to approve the November 6th and November 20th minutes, and Leslie Barstow seconded. The Council unanimously approved all minutes presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Tara Haley opened the floor for public comment. Dawn Bell shared that her organization has reduced the frequency of its board meetings, which has led to improved attendance, and she asked whether this Council has ever considered meeting less frequently. In response, the Council acknowledged and appreciated the suggestion and noted that meeting requirements may be outlined in the by-laws. That meetings are often cancelled during blackout periods, and that monthly consecutive meetings remain important due to required processes. No other public comment.

REPORT FROM COMMISSIONER ARNOLD: Commissioner Sarah Arnold was absent.

OLD BUSINESS: Continuum of Care (CoC) Update: Anita Daniel reported that HUD released the FY 2025 CoC Youth Homeless Demonstration Program NOFO on November 13th. Four Letters of Intent were submitted by the November 26th deadline, with full applications due December 14th and the consolidated application due January 14th, resulting in a shorter turnaround. Two applications include joint transitional housing and rapid rehousing for the first time. A major change in this year's NOFO is the reduction of Tier 1 funding to 30%, down from 90%, meaning far fewer programs are guaranteed funding while Tier 2 projects may or may not be awarded. This shift could significantly affect HUD-funded programs nationwide, but the team is working to submit the strongest consolidated application possible and will keep the Council updated. Lastly, the new Housing Navigator is Vida Khol, and the search continues for a Veteran to serve as the Patriot Place Coordinator.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Approve 2026 Meeting Dates:** Tara Haley opened the floor for approval of the HHSAC 2026 meeting dates and noted that the January 1st meeting was moved to January 8th due to the holiday. No comments or change requests were made. Howard Hitzel moved to approve the dates, and Kathleen Patneau seconded. The Council unanimously approved the document.
- **St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS) Presentation by Dennis Maneja (Chief Operating Officer):**
 - **Community Outpatient Center update:** Dennis reported that the center held its ribbon cutting on October 22nd, 2025, with strong community support. The facility consolidates four HHS-funded programs-Mobile Response, Coaches, the Community Action Team, and Care Coordination-into one location to improve service delivery, supported by state appropriations and county match dollars. Local leaders, law enforcement, providers, the school district, and members of the St. Johns County legislative delegation attended the event.
 - **Independent Living Village progress:** Dennis shared that the groundbreaking is scheduled for January 28th, 2026. The project will include 12 townhome-style units providing transitional housing and comprehensive supportive services for youth aging out of foster care. Planned services include mental health support, case management, job and career coaching, psychoeducation, life-skills training, and social-skills development, all aimed at promoting long-term self-sufficiency. He reviewed data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation showing the heightened risks these youth face-including housing instability, employment and education barriers, and other compounding challenges-and noted that the project is expected to be completed in spring 2027. Dennis noted the target age range is 18–21, though program details and any enrollment caps are still being developed. Job coaching will include hands-on support throughout the entire employment process, and employer participation will be important for monitoring progress and gathering feedback.

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

- Shawna Novak provided an update on the formal needs assessment process. The community survey launched this week with strong outreach and has already received 213 responses. It will remain open through early January. The stakeholder survey was resent from a HHS email to avoid spam-filter issues and focus group invitations have been sent for sessions covering areas such as housing and food insecurity, aging and transportation, and substance abuse and mental health. HHS is asking partners to identify clients willing to participate. Surveys are expected to be completed in January, with the final report due in April 2026.
- Shawna shared a story from Adoption Day about a touching ceremony involving a 16-year-old boy and his grandmother, whose home had burned down and been rebuilt. The event was featured on the Clerk's social media.
- This weekend, HHS will host the annual foster care Christmas party at Tringali Barn for children in care, with a full day of activities and gifts.
- Shawna reported that SNAP benefits were temporarily paused due to the federal government shutdown. With nearly 10,000 local residents relying on SNAP, the county proactively allocated \$200,000 from emergency reserves to support food pantries experiencing overwhelming demand. Approximately \$117,600 was distributed to about ten organizations. Each organization has 90 days to expend the funds, with reporting requirements.
- Lastly, Shawna reported progress on the on-site monitoring of independent agencies. After delays caused by the pandemic, Katrina and HHS Quality Assurance staff successfully completed the monitoring visits, with agencies largely meeting expectations.

FUNDED AGENCY UPDATES:

Early Learning Coalition (ELC): Brittany Spangler with ECS4Kids reported that enrollment is open for the School Readiness Program, which provides financial childcare assistance for children from birth through age 12 who are on the waitlist. The state increased the income eligibility threshold in November, and she encouraged partners to help spread the word to families who may qualify. Families can be directed to the ECS4Kids website or the office on Clark Street. Even if a family does not qualify, ECS4Kids can assist them in finding more affordable childcare options or connecting them with other community resources.

Betty Griffin Center (BGC): Kelly Franklin reported that in November, BGC received 117 hotline calls and served 242 individuals- 168 through outreach and 78 through residential services- including 159 adults and 83 children. Since the fiscal year began in July, the center has served 644 individuals (499 non-residential and 183 residential). BGC advocates have been visiting local libraries to raise awareness about available services, and the organization is currently running its Adopt-A-Family program, which supported 100 families during the holidays last year.

St. Augustine Youth Services (SAYS): Schuyler Siefker reported increased holiday demand for mobile crisis services, with higher call volumes and more depression-related concerns. The mobile crisis, care coordination, and the CAT team are currently fully staffed and continue to work through existing caseloads and waitlists. In partnership with HHS, they're providing Christmas support for 150 children and recently provided 49 Thanksgiving dinners to families in the community.

Council on Aging (COA): Brian Robinson reported that programs at the senior centers- including the Integrated Member Enhancement Program, Independent Living Services, and the Senior Day Care- are all running well. The primary focus at this time is selecting the next executive director, as Becky Yanni will retire at the end of the year. A decision is expected within the next two to three weeks.

St. Francis House (SFH): Judy Dembowski reported SFH have permanently housed more than 200 people from the beginning of the year to the end of November and have many more in progress for December.

Emergency Services & Homeless Coalition (ESHG): Marion Bluhm reported they're still waiting for their new office to open, though the parking lot improvements are complete. Staff are preparing Christmas items for about 40 children, with a Christmas bash scheduled for the 20th. Lastly, they're renovating a home for a family to move in by the end of the year.

Epic Behavioral Healthcare: Nangela Pulsfus reported the Second Wind Village is now open and serving nine clients, with additional applicants- including families with children- currently being interviewed. A second co-response clinician is expected to start in late December or early January. From January through November, the team served 622 community members and achieved a 97% diversion rate for Baker Acts, with most interventions involving adults over 55 or juveniles; about 13 clients served were experiencing homelessness. The program is now Medicare Part B credentialed. Nangela also highlighted partnerships with COA, the UF Plus Bus, and the DCCI Task Force to support dementia screening and intervention at the county library and noted the launch of a caregiver support group to provide guidance and resources.

Good Samaritan/Wildflower Clinic: Candance Ray reported that they partner with 13 agencies to provide volunteer blood pressure screenings and wellness checks and encouraged anyone interested in having them visit to reach out as they expand their outreach efforts. Volunteers logged 820 hours last month and over 600 hours so far this month. The day before Thanksgiving, they partnered with the Dental Specialists of Northern Florida for their annual extraction day, serving 49 patients and completing 215 extractions.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

SMA Healthcare: No representative present.

Department of Health: Lana Sample, SJC DOH Assistant Director, reported they previously had staff certified to conduct car seat checks and installations, but those staff have since left. A new employee is currently in training to regain that certification so the service can resume. Kenice Taylor added that the team has been active in community outreach, tabling at various events to provide education on emerging health trends and public health concerns. With many new staff members, they are also focused on training their team, introducing them to partner services, and strengthening their ability to connect families with appropriate resources.

UF Health St. Johns: Paige Stanton reported that the new co-responder care coordinator, Sheena, has joined the team from the UF Health Behavioral Health Resource Center with strong experience. Planning for the BRAVE Summit is underway, with monthly committee meetings and the event scheduled for March 25, 2026, from 3–7pm with flyers coming soon. UF Health St. Johns has transitioned to the larger UF Health website as its own page. The team is partnering with ID GO mobile ID services to support patients who lack identification, creating an additional pathway for care coordination. Santa's hospital lobby visit is scheduled for Tuesday the 8th from 5–7pm for anyone to join. Lastly, the UF North Pole event will take place at the Nocatee Health Village on Wednesday, December 17th, offering educational materials and family activities from 4:30–7pm.

Public Safety: Director Wildes reported that the current co-response team is doing well and eager to bring the second team on as soon as possible, noting it will enhance their impact. She also shared that they will be the first jail system to implement the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) process within the facility, allowing individuals to begin treatment while incarcerated and then transition seamlessly to community-based services upon release.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The next General Meeting is scheduled for January 8th, 2025, at 4:00pm via Microsoft Teams and in person at the Health & Human Services Kingfisher Conference Room, 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 4:46pm