

**Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health  
Black & African Heritage Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC)  
Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
May 1, 2025 10am-12pm**

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## **WELCOME**

### **Land Acknowledgement**

### **Introductions/Check-In**

**Co-Chairs:** Romalis Taylor and Queen Nina Womack

**Attendees:** Afimaye Galarraga, Alvan Robinson, Aretha Hampton, Blanca E. Watson, Dr. Brenda Ingram, Brianna Johnston, Charline Nunez, Chell'e Jones, Christopher Jackson, Dawn Bounds, Erica Robinson, Irene Ratliff, Jenny Fotang, Jibril Hussen, Jineen Perry-Myles, Joann Reeder, Joy Ellington, Joyce Sales, Juanita Randle, Leon Maultsby, Madeline Rooks, Paula Estes, Pauline Giscombe, Queen Nina Womack, Rhoda Addam, Romalis Taylor, Sade Richardson, , Virginia Mitchell, Wendy Cabil

**DMH Admin and Staff:** Dr. Chiyah A. Lawrence, Donnise Vonner, Dr. Erica Melbourne, Dr. Jennifer Alquijay, Yailin Noriega, Yue Hua Xu

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### **Introductions**

Queen Nina Womack opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and taking a few minutes to check in with everyone after reminding the group that June will be the last meeting with she and Romalis Taylor as co-chairs. She invited attendees to introduce themselves, especially those who were attending for the first time. She reminded everyone that May is Mental Health Awareness Month and encouraged attending some of the many activities throughout the County and DMH.

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### **Approval of Minutes**

- Motion by Wendy Cabil to approve minutes and seconded by Queen Nina Womack
  - BAH UsCC Subcommittee approved April 2025 meeting minutes
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### **DMH Updates**

Dr. Jennifer Alquijay provided the following DMH Updates:

- End of Fiscal Year
  - The fiscal year ends on June 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - The current Capacity Building Projects are under way. This is the first year with a hard deadline and all projects need to be complete by June 30<sup>th</sup>. We are working with vendors carefully, monitoring projects, and trying to support them as much as possible in terms of crossing the finish line.
- BHSA Transition
  - We will be transitioning from the Mental Health Services Act to the Behavioral Health Services Act over the next year. There will be some changes in terms of rearranging the fiscal priorities as managed by the state.
  - Some changes will include significant reductions in outpatient services. There will be a big transformation to full service partnerships, an intensive model. We do want to try to keep services as stable as possible for the communities.

- Obtaining community input is an ongoing big lift for management. Mirtala Parada Ward likes to bring up the importance of attendance.

- Vendor Support

- We are trying to find ways to provide additional support to vendors. Our budget lead, Elaine Waldman, has scheduled technical assistance sessions – office hours that vendors should feel free to join and ask questions (e.g., billing or invoicing) or troubleshoot any problems they may have.
- There will be three separate technical assistance sessions, one is in the late afternoon as we are trying to provide some flexibility for vendors.

- Anti-DEI Impact on DMH

- The ARISE Division is committed to continuing to dismantle white supremacy. Only one percent of DMH funding is from the federal government, the rest of the funding is from local and state, as far as Dr. Alquijay understands.
- We are not going to be *significantly* impacted. The department has not plan to alter how we do services in terms of addressing racism. Dr. Alquijay has not heard anything about changing the way we do business as a result of the current administration's stance.

- Questions

- Will some of the reallocation of funding be redistributed out to the community to provide support for homeless people as a part of the state's redesign? What are we going to do with regards to continuing to support the BAH program as we move forward?
  - Some full-service partnership funding is supposed to be geared toward the unhoused population. That is one of the ways they were trying to address services for the unhoused; with the more intensive services shift.
  - As far as Dr. Alquijay knows, the UsCC Unit and programs are important to the department. At this point in time, the commitment is to have all these meetings continue. While things could change as there is still another year, Mirtala Parada Ward has not heard anything to the contrary. As far as we know, things will continue.
- Dr. Brenda Ingram referenced her question at the April BAH UsCC meeting regarding if there were plans to implement any sort of additional supports around hate based incidents and crimes being on the rise by somehow having another hotline.
  - Dr. Alquijay did bring it up to management. We still want to see what we can put in place.
  - One thing the UsCC unit is trying to do is incorporate more support and education and interventions of how to decrease hate based incidents into the capacity building projects we are doing.
  - Dr. Alquijay acknowledged that Dr. Ingram brought up a good point around training, addressing, helping clinicians know how to support the victims of hate based incidents as well. She stated that she may reach out to Dr. Ingram more to see if we can get more input from her. Dr. Alquijay will bring it to the attention of management and will keep turning up the volume as best she can.
- Queen Nina Womack stated that it was reported that LASA is no longer in control of funding. Whatever funding they were receiving will be coming from the county. She asked if anyone have any comments or know anything they can provide with relation to that? How that will maintain or eliminate current homeless funding housing needs?

- ~~Dr. Alquijay did not have any information to provide. It was suggested that someone from the department that has taken over the LASA operation present to the BAH UsCC about the homelessness and what they will do to address it.~~

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## Co-Chair Election

Dr. Chiyah A. Lawrence provided the following update re: the BAH Co-Chair Election:

- After multiple emails sent to the BAH UsCC subcommittee and separate emails to eligible voting members, we have one nominee for co-chair: Sade Richardson.
- A ballot will be sent to eligible voting members via email.

Sade Richardson spoke with the group regarding her nomination for co-chair:

- Sade shared that she would like to be cochair for the following reasons: she wants to represent BAH UsCC in the community. She is looking forward to all the insight and input to advocate for the BAH UsCC, making sure we hold the department accountable for whatever it is that we need in our communities. She will try to work with DMH to receive this for our family and all the other people within the communities - whether it is the African community, the Black community, etc. She asked that the group make sure to utilize her to collaborate with DMH staff. She wants to be sure to be available to the BAH UsCC in whatever way is needed for the community and to represent the organizations in the community. She wants to make sure that DMH is aware that we are here and utilizing the funds and everything they provide to bring it back to the community. She wants to make sure she articulates the group's needs correctly so that we can all make the decisions we need to make. She would love to represent the BAH UsCC.
- Romalis Taylor noted that this is not the first time that Sade has been a candidate. She was a cochair years ago. She was very effective in how she advocated for the community. She is coming back.
- Question to Sade: Now that you stepped away from this position and you are returning, have you noticed or have there been insights that have come to you that you feel like you could do things differently than before?
  - When she stepped down, there were a lot of transitions within the department including new leadership. Sade knew that it would be hard for her to remain effective and be able to advocate with so many different changes within leadership, as things would get lost within the organizational changes, and she decided to step down. She is a community member and still advocates for different things in the community. She stated that she is here with you all, a part of you. However she comes back, it would be as a tool. She is a tool to the community as well.

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## Capacity Building Project Updates

Erica Robinson and the Health Matters Team shared a presentation on the Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Workshops Project:

- Unstoppable Workshop
  - They hope participants who attend are able to write their story by learning how to recognize, confront, and heal from the mental health challenges that affect Black people and people with disabilities. They want to uncover the roots of generational and systemic trauma, shift to empowered living, and be able to replace silence and stigma with self-advocacy, strategy, and support.
- Erica shared about Health Matters, the organization presenting the workshop, workshop dates, and how BAH UsCC community members can get involved.

- Health Matters is 501C3 nonprofit born during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic. They were able to provide mobile outreach, host pop up clinics and different wellness programs that were able to bring care to underserved communities. They work through volunteer driven services and trusted partnerships with community-based organizations.

They are able to meet people where they are, whether they are on the streets, schools, or beyond.

- She acknowledged all those who really poured in a lot of time and effort and deep thought into putting this workshop together so it would be impactful and let the members become unstoppable.
- The overview of the Unstoppable Workshop curriculum is to share culturally responsive and relevant evidence based mental health education. They want to reduce stigma in the Black community, build in intersectionality, how black people tend to cope.
  - There are five modules. They incorporate activities and discussion to get people to talk about mental health and how they may address the issues in their community. They focus on the most common mental health challenges that black individuals are facing depression and anxiety. Intersectionality. They educate people on understanding how some of the coping mechanisms we have been socialized to you are also detrimental to health. They identify local resources they can utilize to support them.
- There was a facilitator training. They trained people to facilitate the modules in the community. That process was having them do a training and talking about how they may tailor that presentation depending on the spot they are working in. Not all communities will receive the materials in the same way. They want them to represent the communities. They did that training to make sure the facilitators understand symptoms and felt comfortable delivering information on super woman schema, healthier ways to cope, and how locate recourses.

Dr. Lawrence will share information regarding upcoming workshop dates for BAH UsCC members via email so that members are able to share it with their communities. If you are unable to attend and you still want to get some information about mental health and the eight dimensions of mental health and wellness, you can tune into our podcast; that information is on the Health Matters website: [Health Matters Clinic | Nonprofit Mobilizing Communities for Health Equity](https://www.healthmatters.clinic/) <https://www.healthmatters.clinic/>

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## Break

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## Mental Wellbeing Presentation

Dr. Aretha Hampton shared a mental wellbeing presentation for Mental Health Awareness Month. She focused on cultivating our mental health so that we can continue to the work we do in a way that is meaningful to us.

Dr. Lawrence will send the presentation to the group via email.

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## Life Links

Dr. Brenda Ingram provided an update on the Life Links project.

- She and her team are trying to update the Life Links Resource Guidebook and to have it be a little more specific in terms of focusing on organizations, agencies, individuals who provide healing and mental health services that are culturally affirming.
- They did a service provider survey and there is still a need for referrals. They are hoping to hear the voices of the people in this meeting. They have asked for feedback and “it has been pretty crickets” as they have not gotten a lot of responses.

- They have reached out to almost 300 agencies – wellness, yoga, and other services.
- They went to all the DMH SALT meetings where there was low attendance.
- They will offer two more focus groups this month.
  - For SAs 1 and 2, there is a group on Saturday, May 3rd at 10am. The others were held during the week/on weeknights.
  - There is a focus group in SA 6 and 8 next Saturday, May 10th. If you can't make the May 3rd meeting, go the 10<sup>th</sup>, even if you live or work in a different service area.
- There are four months remaining for the project and Dr. Ingram wants them to do the best they can. Any provider can be included in the guidebook.
  - “You do nails. You have a spa. You do presentations on wellness, do the surveys. You could be a for profit, nonprofit. We want to hear them from you”.

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## Community Events and Announcements

## Community Engagement

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## Labor Acknowledgment

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### Upcoming Meeting: June 5, 2025 (10:00am – 12:00pm)

For more information about the BAH UsCC, please see its website:  
<https://dmh.lacounty.gov/about/mhsa/uscc/black-african-heritage-uscc/>