



**Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
Black & African Heritage Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC)
Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
August 7, 2025 10am-12pm**

WELCOME

Introductions/Check-In

Co-Chairs: Romalis Taylor and Sade Richardson

Attendees: Blanca Watson, Olina Bishop, Pauline Giscombe, Joyce Sales, Pharaoh Mitchell, Kirsten Pannell, Madeline Rooks, Nina Spain, Coach Afi, Rhoda Addam, S'corra Thimas, Charline Nunez, Jocelyn Zelaya, Wendy Cabil, Brenda Ingram, Senait, Gina To'omalatai, Jordan Thomas, Alpha Timbo, Jenny Fotang, The Zeus Network, Gregory Parker, Seun Adbowale, Erica Melbourne (DMH), Dewayne Hervey (DMH), Geraldine White DMH), Donnise Vonner (DMH), Queen Nina Womack

DMH Admin: Dr. Christina Barnes-Matthews, Dr. Jennifer Alquijay, Carla Jaramillo, riKu Matsuda, Yailin Noriega, Jamie Walker

Land Acknowledgment:

- Not read due to the meeting being behind schedule.
- LA County Land Acknowledgment:
<https://lacounty.gov/government/about-la-county/land-acknowledgment/>

Approval of Minutes:

- The July 2025 meeting minutes were approved.
- Motion by Wendy Cabil to approve minutes with corrections and seconded by Coach Afi.

DMH Updates:

Dr. Jennifer Alquijay provided the following DMH Updates:

- Meeting settings may change due to updated safety measures for public meetings
- Romalis Taylor will continue his role as co-chair until June 2026
- SOW's have gone out to ISD for next steps in the process
- Dr. Alquijay will no longer be with LACDMH, Mirtala Parada Ward will be covering

Romalis, Joyce, Wendy, and Senait expressed their appreciation for Dr. Alquijay's work with the BAH UsCC. Community members expressed their thoughts and feelings about Dr. Alquijay's news.

Presentation: Youth and Young Adult Drug Prevention

Senait Admassu, Jocelyn Zelaya, and S'corra Thomas shared a presentation about their capacity building project "Youth and Young Adult Drug Prevention"

- The project provided peer-to-peer education, empowerment, and public speaking skills for youth ages 16-24 in the Antelope Valley.
 - Recruitment occurred between March-October 2024
 - 70 youth were reached; 38 youth enrolled
 - There was difficulty with maintaining enrollment, especially during summer months
 - They hired a Community Engagement Coordinator to assist with outreach and engagement
- November-December 2024: 8 youth were engaged in the program and 4 completed the program
- February 2025 hosted the African Summit where youth shared a spoken word piece entitled “When I Grow Up, I want to be Heard”
- It was noted the biggest challenge was the training phase due to participation decline
- Youth participated in bonding activities
- Survey results showed that the youth improved their understanding of substance use and mental health
- Narcan was also passed out and explained on how to use

Q: Pharaoh Mitchell: Asked why programs from the Antelope Valley were not reached out to and explained that he has a youth program.

A: S’corra: We had a lack of presence in Antelope Valley, and our office is located in LA and we had difficulty with different resources. That is a good point of who we could have connected with.

A: Senait: We got the project and were highly recommended. We invited people to help us out and maybe we missed the opportunity to connect. Wendy was assisting us with connecting with others in the Antelope Valley. The Black children needed this program, and we worked with people all over including Lancaster City Hall project

Pharaoh: People in Antelope Valley don’t like people in Lancaster and the Latino community has been treating the Black community here horribly. We go through a lot up here and we service everybody but without financial help a lot of programs close down.

A: Senait: Let’s work together because not one organization can make a difference we have to work together

A: Wendy: Thank you Pharaoh for giving us a realistic viewpoint and I would like to propose we continue with part two of the project

Q: Joyce Sales: When the children said they didn’t see themselves did they mean in this administration? Were they speaking of the participants? Who exactly were they referring to when they said they do not see themselves?

A: Senait: We presented through the high schools and in Lancaster it was very successful. We tried to engage school leaders then they said we don’t have contacts for parents due to the age of the kids. The kids feel bullied and unwelcomed. The recruiting process was never consistent, and we gave them \$25 stipend every time they came. They said every project they come use our voice, data, and leaves us behind.

Q: Joyce: You went to schools? The schools didn't work so you went to organizations? Who's representing these organizations? We know that Blacks are isolated but when they came to the program did, they not see more of themselves?

A: Senait: It could be a combination but I don't know, the internal structure of each organization worked with boys and girls some of them had Black or African heritage. We didn't ask how many of each racial group is being served.

A: Joyce: Maybe next time engaging with elders or adult mentors to share that this program is for the Black youth

A: Dr. Brenda Ingram: Maybe we need to build a coalition in the Antelope Valley if there is not one already before we do another project

25-26 Fiscal Year Project Proposals

- Romalis read the proposal summaries for projects going up for bid this fiscal year.
 - Black Led Organizational Project
 - Black Teen Empowerment Summit
 - Empowerment Bridge
 - Community Outreach and Engagement
- Dr. Barnes-Matthews redistributed the email with proposal descriptions.
- **Q:** Dr. Brenda Ingram: I wanted to discuss the timeline, we were supposed to be notified of the bidding process in June, it's going to be September which means it will take another month or two and we need to be done by the fiscal year, we are going to be pushed. I'm not sure what the challenge is to get this ready by July 1 because it will be September/October before anyone gets their bid fully done. The time gets cut or we tell people they and go past June 30th. We don't have a year with admin challenges, and I think we have to be very realistic about that.
- **A:** Dr. Barnes-Matthews: I know some of what you are talking about is less DMH and more ISD but I will bring the concern to the team and Dr. Lawrence.
- **Q:** Romalis: Can we reconsider the stringent timeline of June 30th?
- **Q:** Senait: ISD timing is off you have about 5-7 days to bid. The other question is what about geographic location?
- **A:** Romalis: The project you just did was specific to Antelope Valley, it depends on the project
- **A:** Dr. Ingram: The SPA is stated in the proposal that we voted on

Community Engagement/Community Events and Announcements

- The Community Engagement and Community Events and Announcement portions of the BAH UsCC Subcommittee meetings are similar:

- The community engagement portion is when the subcommittee members have the opportunity to share what is on their mind, have things that they want to share/discuss or concerns to address.
- The community events and announcements portion is where various upcoming events or activities happening throughout the community can be shared.
- Taste of Soul; still awaiting response from DMH if there will be a table. Dr. Ingram said she applied to be a Vendor but is awaiting DMH. Jamie (DMH) shared she will check in with service area 6 liaison
- Dr. Ingram shared she has about 180 business in the Life Links Directory and is still looking to expand, her goal is at least 500 businesses
 - Dr. Barnes-Matthews sent the email survey to BAH

Labor Acknowledgment-Sade Richardson

Upcoming Meeting: Thursday September 4, 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/>