



**Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
Black & African Heritage Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC)
Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026 10am-12pm**

Welcome

Introductions/Check-In

Co-Chairs: Romalis Taylor and Sade Richardson

Attendees: 3107454430, Alex Vergara, Alvan Robinson, Brenda Ingram, Carlton Roberts, Charline Nunez, Coche Reed, Dr. Donald Grant, Irene Ratliff, Jasmine Harris, Jim the Hat, Joelle Daniel, Jordan Thomas, Joyce Sales, Juan Recinos, Juanita Randle, Dr. Karen Gunn, Dr. Lafawn Brito, Keith Coleman, Kirsten Pannell, Maunda Jackson-Stewart, Miss Nancy Steward, Patricia Kusaba, Pauline Giscombe, Ramona Chatman-Morris, Raymond L. Menefee, Senait Admassu, Tatiana Turner, Von Simmons, Wendy Cabil, Captioner | Victoria

DMH Admin and Staff: Adam Benson, Angelle Hill-Seetal, Dr. Carla Jaramillo, Dr. Chiyah Lawrence, Dr. Darlesh K. Horn, Dewayne Hervey, Dr. Erica Melbourne, Jamie Walker, Dr. Jessica Wiechec, Lavinia Arakilians, MC Harris, Mirtala Parada Ward, riKu Matsuda

Land Acknowledgment

- LA County Land Acknowledgment:
<https://lacounty.gov/government/about-la-county/land-acknowledgment/>

Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve December minutes by Wendy Cabil, seconded by Kirsten Pannell. November Minutes approved unanimously with no corrections, with Wendy Cabil abstaining.

DMH Updates:

Mirtala Parada Ward provided the following DMH Updates:

- The Mental Health Multicultural Conference is scheduled for March 17–18 at the InterContinental Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Registration is expected to open mid-week next week, and notification will be shared once available.
 - The conference will offer 200 scholarships for youth, consumers, individuals with lived experience, and community members. Scholarship recipients will receive free admission. The general registration fee is \$35 for two days, which includes two breakfasts and lunches.
 - Registration materials will include information on scholarship applications and language accessibility requests (CART, ASL, Spanish interpretation). Attendees are asked to request accommodations in advance.
 - DMH received approximately 70+ proposals. A scoring committee of 10 staff members used a rubric to evaluate submissions. 32 presenters were selected. Acceptance notifications were sent Friday and Monday from the ARISE Division mailbox. Denial notifications will be sent by the end of the week. Mirtala emphasized the competitive nature of the process and thanked all applicants.
- Mirtala noted the four ongoing Capacity Building Projects and acknowledged Dr. Lawrence's coordination efforts.

- Dr. Brenda Ingram inquired about the possibility of reinstating the African American Conference that was held for many years. She suggested potential partnership support through Charles Drew University.
 - Ms. Ward stated that DMH is currently undergoing significant restructuring under BHSA and facing federal budget reductions. Funding previously used for capacity-building and prevention conferences is no longer available under BHSA. The Multicultural Conference represents a compromise solution after a nine-month funding allocation process and five-month Board approval process. Prevention and “wrap” dollars previously used to fund conferences are no longer available; prevention funds have shifted to the state level. While no funding is currently designated for individual cultural conferences, she expressed willingness to advocate if future funding becomes available.
 - Dr. Ingram proposed exploring external funding sources (e.g., foundations such as Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, California Endowment) and suggested a five-year plan to reinstate the conference. She emphasized the importance of institutional will and long-term planning.
 - Mirtala shared that DMH has a grant writing unit. She will raise the issue with the Training Division leadership and place the matter on their radar. She stated that the transition under BHSA may take two to three years. She committed to follow up with an update.
 - Romalis Taylor encouraged sharing potential foundation partners to support advocacy efforts.
 - Dr. Chiyah A. Lawrence noted a comment from the chat from Donald Grant stating that the conference had been impactful and that LA County should take responsibility for identifying funding partners.

Friends of the Children–LA Core Mentorship Program

Alan Arce, Chief Program Officer, and Corey Long, Program Director, presented an overview of Friends of the Children–LA and its LA Core Mentorship Program.

- Friends of the Children provides full-time, salaried professional mentors (“Friends”) who commit to long-term mentorship, enrolling children ages 4–6 (with limited exceptions up to age 7) and supporting them through high school. Youth receive consistent weekly contact, including school- and community-based support.
- The model emphasizes a two-generational approach, supporting both youth and caregivers through mentorship, family engagement, workshops, and connection to community resources. Collaboration with other organizations is encouraged.

- Referrals may be made by individuals, schools, or organizations, with DCFS-involved families prioritized. The referral and enrollment process typically takes one to two weeks and includes caregiver intake and family observation.

Life Links Update

Dr. Brenda Ingram provided the following update on the Life Links resource directory project:

- The Life Link project is currently delayed due to delays in payment to project staff and lack of coordination with DMH website/technology staff to determine formatting and

technical requirements for uploading project materials. Payment has only been received through October, although payment terms were 30 days. Delays are impacting project sustainability, particularly as a small vendor.

- The project cannot move forward with website integration until a technical meeting occurs to determine website capacity, required data format, placement location (e.g., USCC or BHSA section), design and QR code integration specifications.
- Jamie Walker acknowledged delays and indicated readiness to reconnect and move the project forward.
- Dr. Horn clarified procedural requirements regarding the Life Link project:
 - Project materials must first be submitted for internal administrative review. Following internal review, the draft must return to the agenda for formal review before being forwarded to Public Information for posting. Website posting will not occur prior to completion of this internal process.
 - Dr. Horn stated that payment delays and related matters are internal discussions between DMH and the vendor and are not appropriate for discussion in this meeting.
 - Dr. Horn stated that once materials are submitted, reviewed, and approved, the department will not delay uploading them.
- Romalis Taylor reiterated the importance of moving the approved data forward for community access once the process requirements are met.

Dr. Ingram also shared information regarding a summer Trauma-Informed Externship through Charles Drew University, the only HBCU on the West Coast.

- The externship will run approximately May through July (10 weeks, 5 hours per week). Students (BS in Psychology) will be placed in community-based or government organizations serving individuals with trauma histories. Externships are observational/learning-based (shadowing and mentorship), not independent service provision. Students will complete an organizational trauma-informed assessment and provide feedback to host organizations. Organizations interested in hosting a student are invited to contact Dr. Ingram directly.

BHSA Update

Dr. Darlesh Horn provided the following BHSA update:

- The BHSA community planning process has been completed. A draft Integrated Plan has been developed and is posted on the DMH website for a 30-day public review period. Opportunities for feedback include submission of an electronic feedback form (to be posted with the plan) and participation in a public hearing scheduled for April (date to be shared).
- The Community Planning Team (CPT) meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 10, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at DMH Headquarters (Terrace). The meeting will not be held at Saint Anne's. The meeting will include a review of the draft integrated plan, instructions for submitting feedback, and an overview of the stakeholder process redesign.
 - Quarterly large CPT meetings will replace monthly large meetings. Subject matter forums (e.g., housing, prevention, youth, early intervention) will meet between quarterly meetings to focus on implementation.

- The larger stakeholder body will not meet in March and April to allow time for redesign planning. Redesign efforts will resume in May.
- June meetings will focus on foundational planning and integration of behavioral health systems. Implementation redesign begins in July.
- BHSA Budget Office Hours are scheduled for February 19, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Finance staff will be available to answer questions regarding BHSA funding and programs. Questions may be submitted in advance.
- A question regarding funding and focus on youth and children under BHSA (including FSP services) was raised. Dr. Horn will forward the question to finance staff for response during budget office hours.

Black History Month

- Sade Richardson recognized February as Black History month and shared the history and significance of its being celebrated. Carter G. Woodson founded of Negro History Week (1926) which later became Black History Month. The historical selection of February was noted due to the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.
- Dr. Brenda Ingram shared about the liberation calendar created by the African American Policy Forum and Black Heritage Academy that includes a suggested practice each day of Black History Month. Dr. Lawrence distributed a link for more details and the opportunity sign up for daily emails to the group via email.
- Karen Gunn acknowledged Ms. Lamont as a longtime local mental health advocate and community leader. Joyce Sales emphasized recognizing community resilience and contributions. Wendy Cabil noted that February 4, Rosa Parks' birthday, was observed by Metro as Transit Equity Day with free rides.
- Further discussion included reflections on the Martin Luther King Jr. Parade. Participants described both positive community engagement and incidents of youth-related disturbances. Concerns were raised regarding youth behavior, trauma, prevention services, and community safety. Some participants emphasized the importance of continued community presence and positive representation at such events. Comments were made regarding family responsibility, prevention, and the need for trauma-informed and youth-focused services.
- A resource link to Los Angeles County Black History Month events was shared in the chat.

Capacity Building Project Updates

Black Leadership Summit – Dr. Lafawn Brito

- The Black Leadership Summit consists of eight sessions, with two in-person sessions scheduled for February 14 and 15. Registration has closed due to high interest. Presenters include Dr. Brito (leadership), Dr. Walsh (LCSW), and Ms. Harris (career strategy for Black leaders). A flyer will be shared with Dr. Lawrence for distribution.

BRIDGE Workshops for Foster Youth - Dr. Donald Grant

- The BRIDGE Workshops for Foster Youth project is an eight-week workshop series serving foster youth ages 14–21 in Service Areas 4, 6, and 8. Focus areas include identity, confidence-building, mental wellness, relationships, life skills, financial literacy, goal setting, and post-secondary pathways (college, trade, employment).
- Workshops will be held at accessible locations near Metro lines. Youth participants will be compensated. A resource guide will be provided to youth and caregivers.

- ~~Two listening sessions will be held; recruitment partnerships are requested, particularly with social workers.~~
- In response to feedback from Dr. Brenda Ingram, Dr. Grant will develop a supplemental guide for caregivers to reinforce workshop content at home.
- Updated materials will be sent to Dr. Lawrence for distribution.

Outreach and Engagement Project for BAH Communities – Carlton Roberts

- The first event was held in partnership with Breathe Good/WallGoodLA (walkgood.org) on Sunday, February 1. There were more than 1,000 RSVPs and over 600 attendees.
- Activities included journaling, affirmations, Black History discussion, sound bath, guided meditation, vendor market with community resources, free massages, food, and on-site mental health resources.
- The next events are scheduled for May 17 and June 18. Event information will be shared with Dr. Lawrence for distribution.

Labor Acknowledgment

Dr. Chiyah Lawrence read the Labor Acknowledgment.

Upcoming Meeting: Thursday March 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/>