

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Access for All UsCC Minutes

January 14, 2026

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees: Hector Ramirez (co-chair), Fran Sereseres (co-chair), Carlos Benavides, Lura Beautmont, Dr. LaFawn Brito, Wendy Cabil, Daneta Calderon-Vital, Racquel Decipeda, Amy Kay, Bea Leung, Grace Leung, Ismael Maldonado, Guillermo Medina Jr., MargaretAnn Mendenhall, Junko Nagamatsu, Luis Navarro, Irene Ratliff, Isabella Rodriguez, Maria Tan, Gabriela Velasquez, Irma Velasquez, Tracey Walters

DMH staff: Anshu Agarwal, Keianna Crenshaw, Danita Donatto-Mallett, Alex Elliott, Dewayne Hervey, Cintia Huitzil, Carla Jaramillo, Chiyah Lawrence, riKu Matsuda, Martha Ortiz, John Palacio, Nancy Pelayo, Regina Ramirez, Rubou Sous, Tracy Tisino, Suyapa Umanzor, Elaine Waldman, Jessica Wiechec, Yue Hua Xu

Interpreters and captioner: Lucy (Spanish), Claudia (Spanish), Sharon (ASL), Darcy (ASL), Beatriz (CART)

Agenda Items	Discussion and Recommendations
Welcome and Disability Etiquette	Co-chair Ramirez welcomed participants, provided a visual description, and shared the disability etiquette. They introduced new co-chair, Co-chair Sereseres Sereseres.
Moment of Silence	Co-chair Ramirez held a moment of silence in remembrance of Keith Porter Jr., Renee Nicole Good, and others killed in incidents involving ICE
Land Acknowledgment	Co-chair Ramirez read the land acknowledgment .
Labor Acknowledgment	Co-chair Sereseres read the labor acknowledgement .
Community Agreements	riKu read the community agreements.
Community Check-in	• Concern about ICE targeting people with disabilities; emphasized that DMH and the County are available to support anyone impacted; noted the rising cost of food and economic pressures on families. • Concern for seniors, particularly regarding Social Security and living conditions in senior housing in Lancaster; encouraged community members to attend senior

	center open meetings and participate in the LA County Area Plan for Aging (2026–2028) to voice their needs; urged resilience. • Broader concerns about housing subsidy programs running out of funding and the risk of community members becoming unhoused or placed in institutional settings.
Presentation: LA County Help Line / ACCESS Center Presenters: Danita Donatto-Mallett & Nancy Pelayo	• Help Line Overview: Phone number: 800-854-7771 (toll-free, also functions as a national number). Available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, including holidays. 13 language options: English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Armenian, Russian, Arabic, Farsi, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Tagalog, and all other languages (via interpreter services). Service tracks when calling: (1) Crisis/Mental Health Services, (2) Substance Abuse (Department of Public Health), (3) Veterans & Military Family Services. Under Crisis/Mental Health: Option 1 = Crisis Agent; Option 2 = Information & Referrals; Option 3 = Emotional Support. • Mission & Operations: Provide compassionate, timely, and reliable mental health services and information in collaboration with DMH and other LA County providers. Multi-disciplinary staff operate across four shifts (AM, mid, PM, nocturnal/graveyard). • Information & Referral Services: Referrals sent directly to clinics on behalf of callers. Routine clinic referrals: assessment appointment within 10 business days of calling. Service area navigators connect callers to Full-Service Partnership programs and other resources (internal and external). Agents are trained to gather accessibility and consumer preference information so receiving clinics are prepared. • Service Areas: LA County is divided into 8 service areas; agents try to connect callers to services near their preferred location. Calls also received from outside LA County and out of state • Crisis Dispatching: ACCESS dispatches Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams (PMRT) and Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams (MCOT) when appropriate. When weapons or imminent danger are present, callers are directed to call 911. ACCESS does NOT dispatch law enforcement or co-response mental health teams (only PMRT or MCOT). • Other Services: 24-hour notification to DMH providers of after-hours activity (case managers and therapists alerted of overnight/weekend calls). After-hours patients' rights services: assistance filing grievances and complaints. Telephone interpreter services in callers' preferred language. After-hours psychiatric bed tracking. Transportation/ambulance coordination for clients meeting 5150 criteria. Partnerships with Medi-Cal managed care plans.

- **Call Center Modernization:** New system streamlines navigation of resources, documentation, and PMRT/MCOT dispatching. Verizon-based technology allows agents to see if a caller is still connected, reducing accidental disconnections.

Discussion:

- Cody: Asked whether ACCESS staff are trained to handle calls from Deaf individuals using ASL via Video Relay Service (VRS), noting the inherent delay as interpreters wait for signing to conclude before speaking. Reported that staff sometimes hang up during the silence.
- Amy: Explained how VRS calls work—the Deaf person signs to a video interpreter who then voices the message. There can be several seconds (or even minutes) of silence before the interpreter speaks. If the ACCESS agent hangs up during this pause, the call is lost.
- Co-chair Ramirez: Confirmed this is a longstanding issue affecting Deaf and hard of hearing individuals and others using sign language interpreters. Emphasized that LA County has one of the largest Deaf and hard of hearing populations in the U.S. and that dropped calls in crisis situations have serious consequences. Noted the current relay technology used is antiquated and that an update in communication modalities is needed.
- Danita: Acknowledged the issue. Noted ACCESS formerly had contracts with three ASL interpreter companies for in-person dispatch (pre-pandemic), but those contracts ceased after COVID. Currently, during business hours, requests go through the ARISE unit; DMH now has at least a couple of ASL interpreters on staff. After-hours ASL interpreter dispatch remains a gap.
- Nancy: Confirmed that agents are trained not to hang up before the caller and that the Verizon system shows if a caller is still connected. Committed to reinforcing training about the pause/silence inherent in VRS calls.
- Amy: Raised that PMRT field teams often lack ASL-fluent staff, sometimes inappropriately use family members to interpret, and consequently may not collect accurate clinical information. Noted that hospitalized Deaf clients are sometimes released prematurely (within 24 hours) because interpreting services are not provided. This is an ongoing issue unresolved for approximately 27 years of her work with a DMH-contracted agency.
- Co-chair Ramirez: Requested that ACCESS includes accessibility information about referred facilities in the referral process (e.g., wheelchair accessibility, parking, experience working with Deaf/hard of hearing individuals, people with psychiatric disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities, and blind

	individuals). • Danita: Confirmed the provider directory is the primary resource and said ACCESS could work with ARISE and DMH leadership to incorporate more detailed accessibility data. • Nancy: Added that agents already have a notes section in the referral process to capture consumer-specific accessibility needs for the receiving clinic. • Co-chairs thanked staff for sharing information and remaining open to feedback. • riKu will schedule a presentation from the ARISE Language Assistance Services.
Co-Chair Update	Co-chair Ramirez: Will attend the DMH Behavioral Health Stakeholder meetings regularly on Tuesdays. Engaged at the state level on behavioral health policy. Working with the LA County Commission on Disabilities on psychiatric disability, Deaf/hard of hearing issues, accessibility, transportation, and housing. Reported that Supervisor Horvath authored a motion to create ICE safe zones at all County properties (including DMH clinics) to ensure a pre-regulatory process before ICE agents can access these sites. This followed an incident at Friendship Park in Long Beach. Other localities are following suit. Co-chair Sereseres: Expressed gratitude for the ACCESS Help Line presentation and learning about Deaf/hard of hearing service gaps. Shared that despite being in a wheelchair for 16–17 years, she remains active using public transit, Access Services, and Metro Link. Reiterated commitment to serving the community.
DMH Updates	BHSA Administration shared the following updates: •Upcoming Stakeholder Meeting: Tuesday (January 20, 2026), transitioned from in-person to virtual; new time: 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM (previously 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM). Topics include the BHSA Integrated Plan (three-year plan to the state), program budget, prevention, and housing. •Beyond the Walls – Round 2: Launching February 2026. This is DMH’s community engagement effort to reach individuals unable to attend regular stakeholder meetings during business hours. Teams will visit all 8 service areas on Saturdays and Wednesday evenings. Sessions (1–1.5 hours) will cover BHSA updates, state mandates, SALTs, UsCCs, how to navigate the DMH provider directory, and the DMH event calendar. Contact: beyondwalls@dmh.lacounty.gov. Request from Co-chair: Include disability-led organizations, ensuring spaces are safe and accessible for people with disabilities, particularly Black and Brown communities and LGBTQ+ communities.
Approval of Minutes	Tabled approval of December minutes to next meeting in February

Capacity Building Projects Awarded	Dr. Brito (Serve CA) introduced the Emerging Leaders in Disability Justice Project: • Workshop series begins Saturday, February 21, 2026. • Sessions held on Saturdays, 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM. • Topics include leadership strategies, strengthening community connections, and developing community-led workshop projects. • A California-licensed therapist will be present at sessions. • Goal: Amplify the voices of people with disabilities.
Closing	Co-Chairs Co-chair Ramirez and Co-chair Sereseres offered closing remarks.
Next meeting	Access for All UsCC Meeting - February 11, 2026