

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Access for All UsCC Minutes

June 10, 2026

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees

Subcommittee Members: Hector Ramirez (co-chair), Fran Sereseres (co-chair), Amy Kay, Bea Leung, Bianca Gallegos, Coach Afi G, Cody Hanable, Dr. Brito, Elena Tiffany, Gabriela Velasquez, Grace Leung, Guillermo Medina Jr., Irma Velasquez, Junko Nagamatsu, Kee, Kusaba Erica, María Elena Arauco, Maya Thompson, Miss Nancy Miss Steward, Patricia Kusaba, Racquel Decipeda, Shelley Woods, Taj Dixon, Tomia Bowden, Tracey Walters, Wendy Cabil

DMH Staff: Alex Elliott, Anna Yaralyan, Anshu Agarwal, Carla Jaramillo, Chiyah Lawrence, Cintia Huitzil, Guadalupe Corona Arvizu, Jessica Wiechec, John Palacio, Martha Ortiz, Maryam Mozafarinezhad, Scott Musgrove, Suyapa Umanzor, Tracy Tisino, Yailin Noriega

Interpreters & Captioner: Lucy (Spanish), Maria (Spanish), Sharon (ASL), Tim (ASL), Edris (CART)

Welcome and Disability Etiquette

Co-chairs Hector Ramirez and Commissioner Fran Sereseres opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Hector provided the disability etiquette review, emphasizing CART, ASL, and Spanish interpretation access. Participants were encouraged to report accessibility barriers so the meeting could pause and adjust. Hector noted that this accessibility practice, developed during COVID-19, has now become a statewide best practice.

Community Agreements

Dr. Jessica Wiechec read the community agreements, including commitments to anti-racism, respectful dialogue, accountability, and centering marginalized voices.

Land Acknowledgment

Dr. Wiechec read the Los Angeles County land acknowledgment.

Labor Acknowledgment

Dr. Wiechec read the Labor Acknowledgment.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the May 2026 meeting were presented and approved.

Motion: Wendy Cabil

Second: Commissioner Fran Sereseres

Capacity Building Project Presentation: Hearts for Sight Foundation

Presenter: Joseph Burton, LCSW

Project: Expanding Mental Wellness for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Program Overview

- 16 workshops (8 English, 8 Spanish)
- 28 participants (ages 25-72)
- Facilitated by clinicians with lived experience of blindness/low vision
- Culmination event held May 23 with over 120 attendees

Key Barriers Identified

- Mental health stigma
- Social isolation
- Transportation challenges (some participants traveled 3+ hours via Access)
- Limited accessible and culturally responsive services
- Language barriers

Workshop Themes

Floral arrangement, tactile poetry, strength shields, emotional sculpting, growth rings, somatic “letting go,” mask painting, and joy reclamation.

Outcomes

Retrospective pre/post surveys showed significant increases in:

- Connection to community (38% → 90%)
- Comfort discussing mental health (29% → 95%)
- Coping skills (29% → 95%)
- Knowledge of mental health resources (25% → 91%)
- Participants reported reduced isolation, increased self-expression, and strengthened peer relationships.

Recommendations

Expand disability-centered mental health programming, increase providers with lived experience, build peer support networks, and replicate the model across other communities.

Questions and Feedback from Subcommittee

- Amy Kay asked whether the program was marketed to the DeafBlind community, noting the absence of representation. She emphasized that outreach should include GLAAD (Greater Los Angeles Agency on Deafness), which serves Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. Amy highlighted ongoing gaps in ensuring interpreters are provided for mental health services and stressed the need for DMH-funded programs to consistently include language access.
- Joseph Burton responded that the program was advertised broadly to individuals with visual impairments through organizations such as Braille Institute and Wayfinder. He acknowledged that outreach to GLAAD did not occur and welcomed guidance on improving accessibility and interpreter inclusion. He noted that interpreter access remains a challenge for the organization and expressed openness to collaboration.
- Commissioner Fran Sereseres praised the program and suggested it could benefit senior centers, where many older adults experience emotional isolation. She expressed interest in connecting Joseph with senior programs in Lancaster and Palmdale.
- Hector Ramirez commended the project as a community-driven model built “by the community, for the community.” He highlighted the program’s strong accessibility foundation and intersectional approach, noting its significance for blind and visually impaired participants. Hector encouraged presenting the model to the LA County Commission on Disabilities and echoed Amy’s point about ensuring access for Deaf and DeafBlind community members.
- Junko Nagamatsu (GLAAD) thanked Joseph for the presentation and expressed interest in adapting the model for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind communities. She asked how the program’s outcome data was collected.
- Joseph explained that all outcome data came from internally developed retrospective pre-/post-surveys, approved by DMH. Surveys were administered through Constant Contact to ensure screen-reader accessibility, with staff support provided as needed. Visual charts in the presentation were generated using ChatGPT.
- Joseph reiterated that the workshop model is fully adaptable to different populations.

DMH and BHSA Updates

Updates provided by Dr. Jessica Wiechec:

- Introduction of two new UsCC liaisons: Dr. Scott Musgrove (LGBTQ2S UsCC) and Dr. Maryam Mozafarinezhad (AI/AN UsCC).
- Behavioral Health Commission meeting scheduled for June 11.
- Reminder that BHSA transition begins July 1, 2026.

Co-Chair Elections

Two candidates were announced for the upcoming Co-Chair election:

- Commissioner Fran Sereseres
- Tracey Walters

Ballots were distributed via email. Voting eligibility requires attending 5 of the last 9 meetings. Members active in multiple UsCCs may vote in only one Co-Chair election. Voting will remain open for one week.

Advocacy Alert

Commissioner Fran raised concerns about proposed reinstatement of a \$2,000 Medi-Cal asset limit, which could impact IHSS and disability benefits. Members were encouraged to contact legislators. Hector Ramirez expanded on the issue, explaining that the proposal includes reinstating a \$2,000 Medi-Cal asset limit, which would jeopardize services for many disabled Californians.

Hector emphasized that such limits historically forced people with disabilities into poverty and homelessness. Members asked clarifying questions about whether the limit would apply to Social Security recipients. Hector confirmed that it would and referenced ABLE accounts as one of the few tools available to protect savings. Dr. Jessica Wiechec will distribute the advocacy information via email.

Community Discussions and Announcements

- Hector invited members to attend the June 17 Commission on Disabilities meeting (1:00 PM, hybrid format) and committed to sending the meeting link.
- Members were reminded to send announcements and flyers to Access4AllUsCC@dmh.lacounty.gov for distribution and to complete the [Access for All UsCC Subcommittee Membership Distribution List](#).
- Returning member Bianca Gallegos shared appreciation for the group.
- Transportation concerns were raised by Miss Nancy Steward. Commissioner Fran suggested contacting City Hall Administration for information and offered to connect with members offline and discuss.
- Miss Nancy Steward asked about the Department's name change; Hector clarified that LA County remains the Department of Mental Health, though statewide systems vary.

Closing

Outgoing Co-Chair Hector Ramirez offered closing remarks, thanking members for their partnership and reaffirming continued advocacy through the LA County Commission on Disabilities and the California Commission on Disabilities. Amy Kay and Commissioner Fran offered personal thanks to Hector for their service and impact.

Next Meeting

Access for All UsCC Meeting - July 8, 2026