

Special Commission on Access to Behavioral Health Services for Children and Families



**Amy Rosenthal, MPH, MPA
Undersecretary for Health
Executive Office of Health and Human Services**

**January 21, 2026
9:30 - 11:00 am**

Virtual / Zoom



Agenda



1. Welcome
2. Approval of December 17, 2025 meeting minutes
3. Overview of working groups process
4. Working group updates & discussion
5. Discussion of Commission deliverables
6. Next steps



Overview of Working Groups Process



Important Reminders



- **Open meeting law applies for working groups**
- **SharePoint compliance includes:**
 - Do not collaborate within single document during Working Group sessions
 - Please work within your own, unique document, and upload SharePoint or share with state staff
- **Working Group Meetings**
 - Need to be posted 48-hours in advance
 - Notes need to be taken during discussions and shared publicly with larger group at next convening



Working Group Updates



Workgroup 1: Landscape & Funding Analysis



Working Group 1: Initial landscape inputs compiled and preliminary review of service models completed. Funding analysis next.

PROGRESS STATUS: ● In progress

January 2026 | Status as of Jan 21



Key Findings to Date

1. Landscape Analysis

- There is a wide array of behavioral health services for youth across the state.
- Access remains a challenge, particularly for specific subgroups of youth with unmet complex needs, eg, ASD, children with medical needs.

2. Funding Analysis

- Greater clarity needed about which programs are covered by MassHealth and private payers, and other funding streams (state/federal)



Commission Questions & Gaps

- How do Commission members understand this paradox, ie, of having many BH services available across the state, yet access challenges persist?
- Would a cross-agency funding analysis be helpful?
 - Are there opportunities for drawing additional Medicaid dollars for some of these programs, or aspects of these programs (admin)?
- Are there BH services that are essentially duplicative?

Next Steps

- Incorporate Commission feedback shared during 1/21 meeting into draft landscape analysis
- EOHHS agencies (DMH, DCF, MassHealth, etc.) review.
- Commission staff shares updated version with members for their written feedback.
- Revised draft discussed during the Commission's next meeting on 2/25.

Members: Kelly English, David Matteodo, Jessica LaRochelle, Rachel Gwaltney, Kevin Beagan



Workgroup 3: Single Children's Behavioral Health Agency



Working Group 3: Determining the scope and goals of a single children's behavioral health agency

PROGRESS STATUS: ● In progress

January 2026 | Status as of Jan 21

Key Findings to Date



1. Feasibility
 - a) Initial review of examples from other states reveals differing approaches to how consolidation is achieved (whether state agencies are merged or whether state agencies are coordinating through shared workflows), which state agency/functions are consolidated, and what goals the consolidation is meant to achieve
 - b) Assessing feasibility and effects of a single state agency will greatly depend on defining the goals and scope of the consolidation
2. Recommendations
 - a) Confirm that workgroups assigned to:
 - a) charge bb (challenges facing youth and families seeking behavioral health services) will help define the goals of a potential single state agency
 - b) charge aa (list of behavioral health services) will help define the current behavioral health services that would need to be coordinated/consolidated within a single state agency



Commission Questions & Gaps

1. How is the commission defining "behavioral health services" to know what state agency functions and populations of youth should be considered within scope of a single consolidated agency (i.e. is child welfare and/or juvenile justice in or out of scope? Are youth with autism/intellectual disability in or out of scope?)
2. Which of the current challenges facing youth and families seeking behavioral health services should be the goal of a single state agency to address?

Next Steps



1. Workgroup 3 to conduct landscape review of other state examples of "single children's behavioral health agency"
2. Date of Next Meeting: 1/27/26

Members: Lauren Almeida, Paul Hyry-Dermith, Lee Robinson



Example Final Reports



Example Documents for Review



- MOVA 2021-2024 Strategic Plan
- Department of Early Education Strategic Plan: 2026-2030
- MA Health Connector Strategic Plan
- Special Commission on State Institutions Overview and Recommendations
- Pathways to Promise – Special Legislative Commission to Study Poverty



Upcoming Work & Schedule



Upcoming Work & Schedule



Date	Proposed Tasks for Discussion
Jan 21 (Today)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of additional reports/speakers from 12/17• Review of Workgroup initial findings: Landscape and Funding (charges aa and dd)• Additional recommendations for policy recommendation sources- either reports or speakers
Feb 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of additional reports/speakers from 1/21• Review of Workgroup initial findings: Challenges and Policy Recommendations (charges bb and cc)• Additional recommendations for policy recommendation sources- either reports or speakers
Mar 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of Workgroup initial findings: Single Agency (charges ee)
Apr 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of initial package of recommendations
May 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of draft report
June 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of draft report
	Tuesday, June 30, 2026 – <i>Submission of Report to the Legislature</i>



Next Steps



	Date	Time	Location
✓	Wednesday, November 19	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
✓	Wednesday, December 17	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
✓	Wednesday, January 21	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Wednesday, February 25	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Wednesday, March 18	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Wednesday, April 29	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Wednesday, May 20	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Wednesday, June 3	9:30 – 11:00 am	Virtual / Zoom
	Tuesday, June 30, 2026 – Submission of Report to the Legislature		

Red – indicates revised meeting date



Appendix



Commission's Charge



Legal Authority: FY2026 Budget 4000-0300 ([link](#))

Summary: The Commission shall study and report on recommendations for improving access to behavioral health services for children and families, including:

- (aa)** a list of the behavioral health services, including services and treatment for substance use disorder and for autism spectrum disorder, available to children and adolescents under 22 years of age;
- (bb)** a list of common challenges that children, adolescents and families face in seeking behavioral health services including, but not limited to, challenges associated with program eligibility criteria, affordability and cost-sharing, insurance or state program denials, application processes and service authorization processes, staffing, wait times and geography;
- (cc)** recommended policies to address challenges identified under clause (bb) and for streamlining access to behavioral health services for children, adolescents and families including, but not limited to, adolescent continuing care inpatient and residential treatment services;
- (dd)** a review of state funding dedicated to behavioral health services for children across state agencies and MassHealth and an examination of the impact of how such funding is used to maximize the delivery of services and available federal resources;



Commission's Charge (cont.)



(ee) analysis of the feasibility and effects of creating a single integrated children's behavioral health agency;

(ff) a 3-year strategic plan for the delivery of behavioral health services for children and families that considers all providers and payers; and

(gg) any matters deemed relevant by the commission

Report

Not later than June 30, 2026, the Commission shall submit its report to the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, and the Senate and House Committees on Ways and Means.



Review of Key Challenges (bb)



Access, Entry, & Navigation

- No clear starting place; inconsistent entry, referral, and intake pathways
- Families lack clear information on services, roles, and eligibility
- Caregiver burden + barriers from requirements, hours, transportation, transitions

Coverage, Affordability, Admin Barriers & Financing/Sustainability

- Coverage gaps/denials, cost-sharing, reimbursement issues block access
- Admin complexity (eligibility, auth, billing) delays care
- Financing/payment rules (rates, grants) affect sustainability and provider participation

Equity & Population-Specific Gaps

- Persistent inequities by race, language, geography, income, disability, identity
- Insufficient language access and culturally responsive care
- Systems don't fit high-need groups (ASD/DD, medical complexity, DCF/homelessness; ACEs)

Workforce Capacity, Stability & Training

- Shortages and closures reduce availability and continuity
- Turnover (wages, burnout, competition) undermines stability and responsiveness
- Training gaps + lack of diverse/bilingual workforce limits appropriate care (ASD/IECMH)

System Design, Fragmentation & Coordination

- Multiple agencies/payors with limited coordination and accountability
- Inconsistent care coordination processes create gaps and duplication
- Limited cross-system integration; unclear roles/leadership (incl. ASD coordination)

Service Capacity, Wait Times & Crisis Dependence

- Demand exceeds capacity across community and inpatient settings
- Long waits and evaluation backlogs delay diagnosis and treatment
- Limited community options drive ED use and boarding (beds/workforce/step-down limits; acuity)



Working Group & Working Group Action Proposal for Discussion



Proposed Working Groups

- 1. Landscape and Funding** – charges (aa) & (dd); initial presentation 1/21/26
 - 2. Challenges & Policy Recommendations** – charges (bb) & (cc); initial presentation 2/11/26
 - 3. Strategic Plan & Feasibility** – charge (ee); initial presentation 3/11/26
-

Proposed Working Groups' Actions

1. Work will build upon previously completed work and best practice recommendations
2. Presentation at designated meeting to present additional resources, surface initial insights related to recommended paths forward, and provide space for entire Special Commission feedback and discussion
3. Refine findings based on presentation feedback for further presentations and/or submission to final report due in June



Commission Webpage



Webpage

Meeting notifications and copies of meeting materials, such as approved minutes for each of the Commission's meetings, will be posted on the Commission's Mass.gov webpage:

<https://www.mass.gov/special-commission-on-access-to-behavioral-health-services-for-children-and-families>