



Tompkins County
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

Tompkins County Whole Health
201 East Green Street
Ithaca, New York 14850-5421

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Mental Health Subcommittee Meeting
Via Zoom
March 17, 2026 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.
Meeting Minutes

Minutes Approved
May 19, 2026

Present: Mary Hutchens; Larry Roberts; Ben Komor; Cindy Freidmutter; Tracy Decker; Susan Tabrizi

Excused: Jessica Conner

Unexcused:

Guests Present: Shanda Herchanik, OMH; Ben Kane, OMH; Briana Valentine, Elmcrest; Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Cheryl Willer, Catholic Charities

Staff Present: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; and Karan Palazzo, LGU AA

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 pm by Mary Hutchens, who filled in for Larry. Introductions were made. Tracy motioned to approve the February 2026 minutes, seconded by Cindy; all were in favor.

Privilege of the Floor & Announcements: Larry shared that Commissioner Jennie Sutcliffe is holding a Zoom meeting tomorrow at noon to provide an update on the Asteri housing complex.

Discussions:

Accessing Respite Services for Transition Age Youth

ELMCREST

Elmcrest Children’s Crisis Residences – Briana Valentine, Case Management Supervisor, provided an overview of Elmcrest's children's crisis residences, explaining that they operate three programs in Syracuse with 20 beds total, serving youth aged 5-20 who need more support than parents can provide but don't require hospital-level care. The program is voluntary, short-term (1-28 days), and free of charge to families, with no waitlist maintained because referrals are valid for 24 hours. During their stay, youth participate in therapeutic activities, work on individualized service plans, and receive clinical support, with staff providing 24/7 supervision and maintaining connections to community-based services.

Youth Mental Health Crisis Program – Briana explained that their program in Syracuse accepts referrals from various sources and can manage existing medication regimens while not prescribing new medications. She noted that marijuana and alcohol are the most common substances seen in referrals. Ben Kane described their program in Binghamton, which operates in a community residence setting and offers short-term stays of up to 28 days. Both programs emphasize sobriety and provide life skills training, including meal planning and chore management. The Binghamton program currently operates with 6 beds and focuses on maintaining students' educational routines while they receive care.

State-Funded Community Support Programs - Ben Kane, ACR Program Manager, OMH described their program's referral process, primarily receiving referrals from Tompkins County Mental Health and Cayuga Medical Center for step-down cases. He explained that the program is no-cost to families, state-funded, and includes community outings 3-4 days a week. When asked about insurance billing, Ben clarified that they do not bill insurance companies; instead, they use grant funding to cover costs for families without insurance. Shanda began describing their similar program, noting that they operate in a space at EPC rather than a community house, though the transcript ended before she could finish.

EPC Outpatient Psychiatric Services Overview - Shanda Herchanik, OMH, explained that EPC (Elmira Psychiatric Center) operates as a voluntary, community-based outpatient facility on the psychiatric center's campus, serving children from multiple counties, including Tompkins. She detailed their billing process for Medicaid and explained their staffing structure, noting that while they provide crisis services, they do not perform therapeutic holds or administer PRNs, only intervening in cases of imminent risk of death. Shanda also mentioned their 72-hour ISP service and discussed challenges with their current facility setup, including denied requests for a house.

Respite Program Operations Overview

Shanda discussed her respite program's operations, including its capacity to serve up to 6 children, with individual bedrooms, an expanded age range from 5 to 20, and an emphasis on matching participants by developmental level rather than strict age groups. She explained their approach to supporting children's return home, including weekly service plan reviews with family meetings and goal-setting discussions. The program serves children with various diagnoses, including ADHD and ODD, with Shanda noting they work with children who have no formal diagnosis as well as those with more complex needs.

Youth Crisis Program Discharge Improvements

The meeting focused on discharge procedures and follow-up support for crisis programs serving youth. Shanda and Briana described their programs' 30-day follow-up processes and discussed challenges related to recurring admissions stemming from ongoing family issues at home. The group identified gaps in parent education and support as a key issue, with participants suggesting the need for additional programs to support parents of youth in crisis. Ben Kane highlighted the importance of aligning care with families and schools, while some raised questions about collaboration with primary care providers.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

The Next Meeting is Tuesday, April 21, 2026 @ 1 pm