

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)

Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, August 27, 2026

Time: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM CST

Location: Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

4600 Valley Road, Room 4B

Lincoln, NE 68510

[Attend by Zoom](#)

Voting Members Present: Diedra Shaw, Erica Ziemann, Cody McEvoy, Scott Loder (arrived at 2:10 PM)

Technical Advisors Present: Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell, Sara Petersen (arrived at 2:24 PM)

NCDHH Staff Present: Kim Davis, Kendall Couture, Vali Hitz, Simon Highsmith, Rowan Thompson

Sign Language Interpreters: Sharon Sinkler, Ben Sparks

I. Meeting Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:03 PM.

Notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Committee members received notice simultaneously by email. The agenda was kept current and available at the Commission's office and on the NCDHH website. A copy of the Open Meetings Act and meeting materials were made available to the public.

A quorum was present.

II. Public Comment Period

No public comments were recorded.

III. Approval of the Agenda

A motion to adopt the agenda as presented was made by Ms. Diedra Shaw and seconded by Ms. Erica Ziemann. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

IV. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

The committee reviewed prior meeting minutes from February 27, 2025; May 29, 2025; August 28, 2025; February 26, 2026; and June 4, 2026.

Ms. Ziemann requested that the spelling of her first name be corrected from “Erika” to “Erica” in all applicable minutes.

A motion to approve the prior meeting minutes with the noted grammatical corrections was made by Ms. Ziemann and seconded by Mr. Scott Loder. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion regarding the August 28, 2025 meeting record was addressed separately under Previous Business.

V. NCDHH Agency Updates

Interim Executive Director Report – Kim Davis

Ms. Kim Davis announced that the NCDHH Board has appointed Ashli-Marie Grant as the agency’s new Executive Director. Ms. Grant was expected to begin September 1.

Ms. Davis also announced the addition of two new Outreach Liaisons serving Lincoln and Omaha. Simon Highsmith and Rowan Thompson introduced themselves to the committee.

Events & Programs Coordinator Vali Hitz provided information about upcoming NCDHH activities, including Deaf Awareness Month and International Day of Sign Languages.

Behavioral Health Liaison Report – Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell

Ms. Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell highlighted that September is Deaf Awareness Month, Recovery Month, and Suicide Prevention Month and reviewed behavioral health events and activities planned throughout the month.

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell provided updates from her participation in the Metro Area Suicide Prevention Coalition. Recent coalition discussions included suicide-prevention data and trends in the Omaha area, including elevated risk among white males age 50 and older, firearms as a leading method of suicide, and an increase in domestic murder-suicides in the Omaha and Lincoln metro areas.

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell also shared research regarding substance use among Deaf and Hard of Hearing populations and expressed interest in developing additional research-based community partnerships that could increase NCDHH's involvement in data collection.

Additional updates and discussion included:

- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell's participation in Project Extra Mile and the importance of ensuring evidence-based alcohol prevention and recovery methods are accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- Mr. Cody McEvoy suggested exploring a workshop for youth addressing warning signs in dating, social media, and related issues. He identified Thrive Together, an Iowa organization supporting individuals experiencing domestic situations, as a potential community partner.
- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell reported attending the soft launch of Activating Change, an initiative that provides opportunities for Deaf-led organizations to discuss domestic violence issues affecting their communities.
- Ms. Davis noted the availability of statewide Text-to-911. The committee also discussed accessible options available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
- In response to a question from Mr. Loder regarding whether September programming would address suicide prevention and recovery, Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell reported that she was developing NCDHH video scripts addressing general mental health and crisis topics for Deaf Awareness Month.
- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell reported ongoing work with NAMI regarding potential NAMI SMARTS training on legislative participation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Community feedback is being considered to determine whether the training should be offered as one four-hour session or two two-hour sessions.

The committee discussed barriers to substance-use treatment and behavioral health services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans. Mr. McEvoy noted that Nebraska lacks the specialized recovery infrastructure available in some other states and emphasized that substance-use treatment is an access issue for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

Ms. Ziemann asked whether a list was available identifying providers who are Deaf-friendly or use ASL. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell discussed the provider information available on the NCDHH website and reported that she had contacted approximately half of the providers on the list to gather additional information about ASL fluency, availability, and specialties. Particular concern was expressed regarding access for rural populations.

Mr. Loder asked whether providers serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients receive government incentives, such as tax credits. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell could not confirm whether such incentives are available.

Mr. McEvoy referenced the MHAC bylaws and noted the committee's ability to make legislative recommendations. He expressed interest in seeing MHAC take a more active role in pursuing tangible changes. Ms. Ziemann expressed interest in exploring incentives for providers to serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients. She also raised the possibility of NCDHH providing Deaf culture or ASL-related training to providers and whether grant opportunities could support efforts to increase provider accessibility.

VI. Previous Business

August 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Guidance received from the Nebraska Attorney General's Office regarding the unavailable August 28, 2025 MHAC meeting minutes was discussed. Because the original minutes could not be recovered, the committee could reconstruct the meeting record based on the agenda and members' best recollection.

Members recalled that the August 28, 2025 meeting included Director updates from Kyle Miers and discussion regarding the MHAC bylaws and Terms of Reference previously provided to committee members. Plans had been made to continue those discussions at the November meeting; however, the November meeting was canceled, Mr. Miers resigned in December, and the discussion did not resume. Mr. McEvoy also recalled discussion of the Deaf-Centric Hospital initiative.

The committee discussed membership at the time of the August 2025 meeting and recalled participation by Briana Stradinger, Paulissa Kipp, Erik Decker, Scott Loder, Cody McEvoy, and potentially Ronda Rankin.

A motion to reconstruct the August 28, 2025 minutes based on the committee's recollection and accept the reconstructed record as the official minutes of that meeting was made by Mr. Loder and seconded by Ms. Shaw. The motion passed unanimously.

Erica Ziemann Appointment Letter

Ms. Ziemann reported that she had received her official appointment letter. She had not yet received the letter when she participated in the previous MHAC meeting.

Future Conferences, Trainings, and Workshop Opportunities

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell reported that she had emailed committee members a list of more than 20 upcoming conference, training, and workshop opportunities.

VII. New Business

Selection of Committee Chair and Vice Chair

Ms. Ziemann nominated Mr. McEvoy to serve as Chair. Mr. Loder seconded the nomination.

Mr. Loder moved to close nominations for Chair. Ms. Ziemann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Loder moved to elect Mr. McEvoy as Chair. Ms. Ziemann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Shaw nominated herself to serve as Vice Chair. Ms. Ziemann moved to elect Ms. Shaw as Vice Chair. Mr. Loder seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. McEvoy was elected Chair and Ms. Shaw was elected Vice Chair.

2027 Meeting Dates

The committee discussed continuing its regular meeting schedule in February, May, August, and November. Meetings are generally held on the last Thursday of the month.

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell stated that specific dates would be identified and presented at the next meeting.

Mr. Loder moved to approve the February, May, August, and November meeting schedule for 2027. Ms. Ziemann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Following the vote, Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell clarified that meetings would continue from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

Upcoming Events and Professional Development Opportunities

Upcoming events and professional development opportunities were discussed in conjunction with previous business and agency updates.

ASL-Fluent Therapists and Psychologists in Nebraska

Discussion regarding the availability of ASL-fluent therapists and psychologists occurred during the Behavioral Health Liaison report and broader discussion of behavioral health access.

MHAC Structure and Procedural Requirements

Mr. McEvoy raised questions regarding MHAC's procedural requirements, including whether the committee is required to adhere to the Nebraska Open Meetings Act and whether Robert's Rules of Order apply.

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell discussed the state statutes governing MHAC and confirmed that the committee is subject to the Open Meetings Act. Ms. Davis explained that while formal requirements apply to voting and motions, the committee has some flexibility in how it approaches discussion and reporting.

The committee discussed the MHAC bylaws and the distinction between its role as an advisory committee and the procedural requirements governing its meetings. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell noted that changes to certain aspects of the committee's structure, such as meeting frequency and voting requirements, may require legislative changes.

Ms. Davis explained that MHAC can make recommendations that the Behavioral Health Liaison can bring forward to the Executive Director and that the committee's purpose includes advising Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell in her role. Mr. McEvoy expressed concern that the procedural aspects of MHAC meetings may interfere with substantive committee discussion. Ms. Sara Petersen expressed interest in having the new Executive Director review the bylaws and consider possible changes.

Mr. McEvoy moved for Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell and the new Executive Director to review the MHAC bylaws, clarify the committee's role and procedural requirements, and document any specific changes they would recommend. Mr. Loder seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell agreed to provide committee members with the relevant legislation outlining MHAC's procedural requirements.

VIII. Committee Member Updates

Committee members and technical advisors shared updates from their respective roles and organizations, including:

- Ms. Shaw reported that she was working with TASK on activities related to Suicide Prevention Month.
- Ms. Ziemann shared that Nebraska Department of Behavioral Health would hold a Recovery Month event at Antelope Park on September 10, including an individual sharing their recovery story.

- Mr. Loder reported that the Regional Center was updating its standard operating procedures related to the ADA and communication access. As ADA Coordinator, Mr. Loder was scheduling meetings with patients requiring accommodations. Updated procedures will include information regarding accessible care for patients with disabilities. He also shared information about a recovery walk planned for late September that could provide an outreach opportunity for NCDHH and other organizations. Mr. Loder noted that he was considering retirement but remained interested in participating in MHAC.
- Mr. McEvoy shared an update regarding his work with ESU 3 Nebraska Regional Program following the closure of the Boys Town program. His new role includes mentoring youth in schools and connecting them with Deaf mentors.
- Ms. Ziemann asked members for contacts or resources related to Deaf and Hard of Hearing advocacy among Native American youth. Mr. McEvoy identified a potential contact and agreed to provide the information to her.
- Ms. Petersen reported that Diane Meyer had officially retired and discussed the transition as an opportunity to reframe and open new doors. She also reported that changes to educational interpreter standards had officially gone into effect following the Governor's signing in August.

IX. Next Meeting Date

The next Mental Health Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for **November 19, 2026, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM CST at Omaha Central Library.**

X. Meeting Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Ziemann and seconded by Mr. Loder.

The meeting adjourned at 4:04 PM.