VISION
In 2020, the Alabama Legislature appropriated substantial state funds to begin a crisis system redesign to include crisis diversion centers; rural mobile crisis teams (mobile crisis services); and the Alabama Stepping Up Initiative (jail diversion and community engagement) which will continue expansion efforts into all 67 counties over the next two years with state and local matching funds. The vision driving this effort is to significantly reduce the number of people with behavioral health disorders in jail and incidents of housing in hospital emergency departments while waiting for care. Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) adopted SAMHSA’s National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care; Best Practice Toolkit as its model for crisis redesign of infrastructure, settings, and policies and to coordinate fragmented services. ADMH brought together stakeholders including policy makers, members of the 9-8-8 Study Commission (created in Act 2021-359), health officials, state Medicaid, provider organizations, law enforcement and emergency medical technicians, Lifeline operators, NAMI — Alabama, Recovery Networks, and emergency management services (911) to collaborate on its crisis system redesign.

JAIL DIVERSION APPROACH
Alabama’s Crisis System of Care approach includes the development of a Crisis Center in every region of the state. These crisis intervention and stabilization centers are for individuals in crisis, with an average length of stay less than 24 hours and no longer than 7 days. Crisis centers are staffed by an array of mental health and medical clinicians who provide first responders with an alternative to arrest and incarceration or the emergency room for individuals in behavioral health crisis. Each Crisis Center serves as the hub of crisis care for its region.

MEASURING PROGRESS
There are limited data being collected currently as the crisis centers develop. One measure involves police wait times when they transport an individual to the crisis center. They examine other data, such as length of stay, to determine how best to deploy staff and resources. Other measures will be standardized as ADMH develops a data dashboard.

INTEGRATION WITH CRISIS SYSTEM
Crisis Centers coordinate crisis services for their regions. By contract with the state, each Crisis Center must

“All of these initiatives are interrelated and their stakeholders are often the same people. Networking has got us thinking outside the box.”
—Anthony Reynolds, Crisis Care Program Director
FIGURE 1: ALABAMA CRISIS SYSTEM OF CARE

Right Care, Right Time, Right Place

PRE-CRISIS
- Prevention & Early Intervention
- Warmlines
- Peer Support
- Crisis Planning
- Cross-Collaboration with partners & providers

POST-CRISIS
- Prevention
- Case Management
- Peer Support
- Housing & Employment Resources
- Transition Support
- Cross-Collaboration with partners & providers

CRISIS
- Case Management
- Mobile Crisis Units
- 24/7 Crisis Centers
- Regional Access Hotlines
- Trauma-informed Care
- Crisis Phone Lines
- Peer Support

FIGURE 2: MAP OF STATE CRISIS COVERAGE

PROJECT LEGACY

The result of this project has been the formulation of a crisis system design that integrates 988 crisis call centers. The crisis system provides individuals with alternatives to long waits in hospital emergency departments or involvement in the justice system when they are undergoing a behavioral health crisis.

WHAT HAS THE CRISIS SYSTEM REDESIGN PROCESS TAUGHT US?

Staff recognize that many of the participants on the 988 Study Commission were involved in similar initiatives such as the 988 State Implementation Coalition that seek to bring about a new and more comprehensive vision of the crisis system, including how services can be sustained. The group was particularly useful in understanding the diversity of rural and underserved communities. In part, because of their input, crisis centers have some flexibility in how they engage mobile crisis teams, coordinate with law enforcement, and deploy staff.

For further information about this project, contact Ada Katherine van Wyhe at ada.wyhe@mh.alabama.gov.