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## **Behavioral Health Day Helps Bring Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder Awareness to State Capitol**

*Speakers Included Florida First Lady Casey DeSantis and AHCA Secretary Mary Mayhew*

**Tallahassee, FL** – Behavioral Health advocates gathered on the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Capitol today to raise awareness for mental illness and substance use disorders. The event brought together state leaders who addressed Florida’s mental health challenges and attendees who shared their personal stories on living with mental health conditions. One of the guest speakers included First Lady Casey DeSantis.

“The First Lady remains committed to helping people with a mental illness or a substance use disorder,” said Melanie Brown-Woofter, President and CEO of the Florida Behavioral Health Association. “Today she announced Florida’s first Disaster Recovery Mental Health Coordinator will be deployed to Northwest Florida to assist in coordinating mental health services for the area most affected by Hurricane Michael. We applaud these efforts and the entire Hope for Healing Campaign and look forward to working with her on finding meaningful behavioral health solutions for both children and adults.”

This year’s Behavioral Health Day theme was “Well. Beyond Healthcare,” because healthcare is more than just physical health or a trip to the doctor’s office. Mental health and mental illness are vital aspects of healthcare. Research shows that one in five adults will experience depression, anxiety, or any mental illness within a given year. Additionally, one in six children will experience a mental health disorder each year. These statistics underscore the need to educate the public about the prevalence of mental illness and the resources available to help people live with a mental health condition.

“The ability to talk about mental illness is a necessary step to break the stigma associated with these behavioral health conditions,” said Irene Toto, CEO of Clay Behavioral Health Center. “Today, as part of Behavioral Health Day, we’re talking about mental illness. Today, we’re talking about substance abuse disorders, but we want people to be able to talk about this any time. We want them to know they are not alone and it’s okay not to be okay.”

In addition to speakers and attendees, the event attracted more than a dozen collaborative partners representing mental health organizations, law enforcement, recovery organizations, housing and peer support coalitions, and other state associations. At the conclusion of the speakers’ remarks, guests were able to continue sharing their stories in the second-floor rotunda of the Capitol.

### **About the Florida Behavioral Health Association**

*The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. The Association’s members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region. FBHA is the result of a recent merger between the Florida Council for Community Mental Health and the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association. For more information please visit [www.floridabha.org](http://www.floridabha.org).*

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