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Record-Setting Number of Registered Attendees at Florida Behavioral Health Association Annual Conference

Tallahassee, Fla—The Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA) hosted its annual conference, BHCon, virtually last week and set a new record for registered attendees, at over 2,000 people. This is the most the association has ever had register for its annual conference.

BHCon2020 Virtual provided thought-provoking speaker sessions and messages from state leaders including First Lady Casey DeSantis, Attorney General Ashley Moody, who spoke on the opioid epidemic, Agency for Health Care Administration Secretary Mary Mayhew and Department of Children and Families Secretary Chad Poppell.

BHCon is regularly the largest behavioral health conference in the southeast and this year it proved to reach an even larger number of people when it was moved to a virtual format due to COVID-19.

“While it was not the three-day, in-person conference we are all used to, I am proud of our staff for creating a remarkable event where our attendees were able to learn and grow in mental health and substance use knowledge,” Florida Behavioral Health Association President and CEO Melanie Brown-Woofter said.

Hosting the conference virtually allowed for many to attend who otherwise could not because of travel barriers, including herself, said Darcy Abbot, Mental Health Coordinator for the Florida Division of Emergency Management’s Disaster Recovery unit.

Brown-Woofter echoed this by adding “we were able to inform and influence more people by hosting BHCon virtually,” but remains hopeful BHCon2021 will reconvene in-person next summer.

Among the three other keynote speakers, Seminole County Sheriff Dennis M. Lemma also provided an address on the innovative initiatives he has implemented in response to the opioid epidemic. Sheriff Lemma most recently joined Governor Ron DeSantis and the First Lady at a [mental health roundtable](#) in Orlando where substance use was the main topic.

During his opening remarks at BHCon2020, Sheriff Lemma said he has been able to work closely with Attorney General Moody, who is passionate about the opioid epidemic.

Attorney General Moody stated during her conference remarks that [provisional data](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that the United States will see a record-high 70,980 deaths this year caused by opioid overdoses, and underscored that COVID-19 could be acting as a catalyst to opioid-related deaths as the virus is making it harder for drug users to access to treatment.

Sheriff Lemma said Seminole County loses more than 80 people every year due to an overdose. Lemma also shared that medical-based treatment combined with cognitive behavioral therapy is the path to moving forward towards recovery.

“We can help change the face of addiction,” Lemma said.

Governor DeSantis recently [signed a memorandum](#) acknowledging International Overdose Awareness Day, which is held every year on August 31, and aims to raise awareness of overdose and reduce the negative stigma of drug-related deaths.

To find the full speaker videos, PowerPoints and resources from last Thursday’s conference, visit BHCon.org.

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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.