

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH  
NORTHEAST REGION

**Alachua County**  
**Behavioral Health Transportation Plan**  
**2024-2026**

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## Introduction

In accordance with Chapter 394, Florida Statutes, The Florida Mental Health Act (“Baker Act”), and Chapter 397, Florida Statutes, The Hal S. Marchman Alcohol and Other Drug Services Act (“Marchman Act”), Alachua County, Florida, a charter county and political subdivision of the State of Florida (“County”), in collaboration with Lutheran Services Florida as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Managing Entity (“Managing Entity”), has completed this 2024-2026 Alachua County Behavioral Transportation Plan (“Plan”). Implementation of this Plan assures a centralized system and a coordinated provision of emergency services for people in need of help for behavioral health disorders. This Plan supports a comprehensive behavioral system of care.

In coordination with the Managing Entity, the County will review and update, as necessary, this Plan at least once every three years. After the approval by the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners of this Plan and the opening of operations of the designated Central Receiving System referenced herein, this 2024-2026 Plan hereby amends and replaces the 2023-2026 Alachua County Behavioral Health Transportation Plan. An accurate inventory of the participating service providers will be maintained and will be made available at all times to all first responders in the service area.

This Plan will be implemented in accordance with Florida law, including but not limited to the above listed Acts, as may be amended.

## Purpose & Intent

This Plan will serve as the implemented transportation plan as required by law. The intent of this Plan is to describe an arrangement coordinating and improving the access to services within Alachua County and the transportation required under the Baker Act and Marchman Act. This Plan describes how the County and its community will ensure the provision of the “no-wrong-door” model defined in Section 394.4573, Florida Statutes, as may be amended. This description includes the organization of the coordinated systems and how the systems will respond to individual needs and integrate services among various providers. The model used in Alachua County is a Central Receiving System (“CRS”).

A ***Central Receiving System (CRS)*** is identified as a system that consists of a designated central receiving facility that serves as a single-entry point for persons with mental health or substance use disorders, or co-occurring disorders. The Central Receiving System shall be capable of assessment, evaluation, and triage or treatment or stabilization of persons with mental health or substance use disorders, or co-occurring disorders.

A ***Central Receiving Facility (CRF)*** is the receiving facility designed to accept and hold patients under emergency conditions or for psychiatric evaluation and to provide short-term treatment. The Central Receiving Facility shall be capable of assessment, evaluation, and triage or treatment or stabilization of persons with mental health or substance use disorders, or co-occurring disorders. The CRF for Alachua County will be Meridian Healthcare.

The CRS increases the opportunity for utilizing jail diversion programs for individuals with mental illnesses who would be more appropriately served through community-based treatment. There is also a benefit of an overall cost-savings to the citizens of Alachua County by instituting a streamlined system of care. This Plan also includes details on how to access local Mobile Response Team (“MRT”) services and Co-Responder Team services designed to de-escalate crisis situations and where possible divert individuals as an alternative to transporting them to a receiving facility.

This Plan will facilitate the following:

1. An arrangement centralizing and improving the provision of services for individuals accessing emergency behavioral health services.
2. An acknowledgement and agreement that Meridian is the designated central receiving facility for the purposes transporting of individuals who need access to emergency behavioral health services.
3. A transportation system that provides for the efficient and humane transport of individuals who involuntarily need transport to the CRF; and, after initial screening, to other area designated behavioral health facilities, if appropriate.
4. After initial law enforcement transport to the CRF, designate the responsibility for any additional transportation needs of individuals needing access to behavioral health services while under a Baker Act or Marchman Act.

## Designated Receiving System

In the continued best interest of the community and those in need, it is agreed and approved that Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc., a Florida not for profit corporation whose principal address is in Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida (“Meridian”) will serve as the location for the designated Central Receiving Facility (CRF), the single point of access within Alachua County’s Central Receiving System (CRS). This single point of entry will support the “no-wrong-door” model as described in Section 394.4573, Florida Statutes. This Plan will guarantee that individuals in need of access to emergency behavioral health services pursuant to the Baker Act or the Marchman Act will obtain access to services. The CRS will serve as the single point of entry for those with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse issues.

Through the assessment process of the CRS, each individual will be linked, based on needs, with the appropriate level of care (inpatient and/or outpatient) and to the appropriate service provider that can meet their individual needs. Receiving systems partners include inpatient programs at Meridian, the University of Florida (UF) Health Psychiatric Hospital, the HCA Florida North Florida Hospital, and the Malcolm Randall Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center.

The CRF is located at the following address:

**1541 SW Williston Road, Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida 32608**

This Plan, the CRS, and the CRF intend to benefit law enforcement and emergency services by minimizing the amount of time spent on functions when transporting individuals needing involuntary emergency behavioral health services pursuant to the Baker Act or the Marchman Act.

In accordance with Section 394.462(1)(a), Florida Statutes, Alachua County hereby designates:

1. The Alachua County Sheriff's Office as the single law enforcement agency to take a person into custody and to transport that person to the CRF pursuant to the terms of this Plan, provided that the person in need of transport is located within the unincorporated portion of Alachua County, Florida; and
2. The City of Gainesville Police Department as the single law enforcement agency to take a person into custody and to transport that person to the CRF pursuant to the terms of this Plan, provided that the person in need of transport is located within the limits of the City of Gainesville, Florida.

These designations do not include involuntary examinations initiated by law enforcement as any law enforcement officer who initiates a "Report of Law Enforcement Officer Initiating Involuntary Examination" shall transport the person to the CRF pursuant to Section 394.463(2)(a)(2), Florida Statutes.

This Transportation Plan requires all law enforcement agencies in Alachua County to transport individuals meeting the criteria listed below to the Central Receiving Facility located at 1541 SW Williston Road, Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida 32608.

- Adults subject to an involuntary Baker Act.
- Adults subject to an involuntary Marchman Act.
- Youth under the age of 18 years subject to an involuntary Baker Act.
- Youth under the age of 18 years subject to an involuntary Marchman Act.

The person responsible for payment for transportation shall be the person receiving transportation, including but not limited to the following sources: private or public third-party payor, the individual person receiving transportation, or financial settlement for care, treatment, hospitalizing or otherwise.

## Access to Mobile Response Services

### **(Prior to Law Enforcement Transportation)**

In response to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, Ch. 2018-3, the Legislature approved recurring funds to ensure reasonable access to Mobile Response Team (MRT) services in all counties. The Alachua County Crisis Center works with the Managing Entity to provide MRT services in the County. Using other resources including staff and especially trained volunteers, the Alachua County Crisis Center also provides a mobile response to crisis situations for the community. Both MRT services were established with the goal of reducing trauma, diverting individuals from emergency departments or juvenile/criminal justice systems, and preventing unnecessary psychiatric hospitalization.

MRT services are a fundamental front-end component of the County's crisis response continuum. MRT services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide within 60 minutes or less, on-demand crisis intervention services, either on-site or through tele-health, in any setting in which a

behavioral health crisis is occurring, including homes, schools, and other locations throughout the community.

The following services are available through the MRTs:

- Evaluate requests for service to determine if the presenting level of severity meets the clinical threshold for an in-person response.
- Conduct an onsite clinical assessment to determine the need for further examination at a Designated Receiving Facility or licensed substance use provider.
- Assess risk of suicidal and homicidal thoughts or behaviors and if present develop an individualized safety plan.
- Assess the individual for mood disturbances such as depression, anxiety, delusional thoughts, or hallucinations that may contribute to and exacerbate the crisis.
- Identify family or peer conflicts and other disruptive behaviors that are or may contribute to escalating the crisis.
- Provide ongoing services and follow up for up to 72 hours and when possible, conduct a “warm handoff” by actively connecting the individual to another service provider.

MRT services may be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by contacting:

Alachua County Crisis Center  
218 SE 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
Gainesville, FL 32641  
352-264-6789

## Access to Co-Responder Team Services

### **(Prior to Law Enforcement Transportation)**

Additional crisis response services are available in the County through teams comprised of two full-time employees: a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) trainer law enforcement officer and a master’s level mental health clinician. This partnership includes riding together in a police vehicle to respond to calls for service involving persons with mental health crises, mental illness, and calls involving emotionally charged situations.

Multiple teams operate throughout the County, and these are operated and supported by a combination of entities: the City of Gainesville Police Department, the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office, and Meridian. The University of Florida Police Department also operates several teams.

Co-Responder Team members respond to calls in neighborhoods, conduct follow-up visits and help those in crisis access resources. The goal of the Co-Responder Teams is to directly connect individuals in crisis with access to treatment and a range of community services --before a behavioral crisis begins, at the earliest stage possible.

Through the Co-Responder Teams' initiatives, the Co-Responder Team members prevent and divert unnecessary incarceration and hospitalization of mentally ill individuals; facilitate jail diversions; emergency room diversions; and Baker/Marchman Act diversions.

Co-Responder Team services may be accessed by contacting Meridian or Alachua County Dispatch via 911.

## Central Receiving Advisory Council

Meridian has implemented and will maintain a Central Receiving Advisory Council whose purpose will include discussing and enhancing the operations of the CRS, including local transportation plans. It is anticipated that the Central Receiving Advisory Council may be comprised of, but is not limited to, representatives of the following agencies:

- Department of Children and Families Substance Abuse and Mental Health Office
- Alachua County and Municipalities
- Local Law Enforcement
- Meridian
- UF Health
- HCA Florida North Florida Hospital
- Lutheran Services Florida
- NAMI Gainesville

## Medical Treatment

Individuals needing medical treatment shall be handled according to local Law Enforcement or Alachua County Fire Rescue/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) policies and/or procedures and be transported to the appropriate medical facility. Neither Law Enforcement nor EMS personnel shall be responsible for the transport of non-medical emergency-related persons.

The CRS will comply with all applicable laws and rules to ensure the health, safety and dignity of those served.

## Patient Choice

In consideration of CRS and its purpose, Law Enforcement will be responsible for the transport of all individuals requiring involuntary behavioral health services to the CRF. That being said, an individual can request care through personal choice of provider. Following an assessment by the CRF and determination of admission, the patient, either personally or through his/her/their guardian advocate, can request to be transferred to a private facility of the patient's choice. This request is contingent upon the patient's ability to pay for the transfer to and treatment in a private facility and acceptance of the patient by the private facility consistent with Section 394.4685, Florida Statutes, as may be amended. The CRF shall be responsible for coordinating and

collaborating with other facilities and units to secure the appropriate transport and placement of individuals to ensure the patient's needs can be met upon such request.

## Inter-organizational Collaboration

Implementing an effective CRS and Behavioral Health Transportation Plan on behalf of persons in need of behavioral health services requires cooperation, commitment, and collaboration from all parties involved. In addition to the support of Law Enforcement and the behavioral health providers, local hospitals have participated in a public planning process that has strengthened the relationships between all parties responsible for implementing the CRS, streamlining efforts for persons in need of emergency behavioral health services.