

# 2020 Psychiatric Intake Response Center Annual Report



# A Letter from the PIRC Director



*PIRC Director Cindy Jones*

Dear Community Partners, Providers, and Friends:

Being called a hero is a distinction not many receive. Since the coronavirus pandemic hit in early 2020, hero has been and is a well-deserved name for the children we care for, each member of our PIRC team and the healthcare providers at Children's of Alabama. Children's behavioral and mental health care is our priority no matter the risk. The team continues to don personal protective equipment (masks, glasses, face shields) like Emergency Department medical providers to interview patients and families in crisis.

Last year, the pandemic stunned everyone. Initially, patients and families were neither coming to the Emergency Department nor calling for resources. Many took the "safer at home" warnings seriously. But as months passed and caregivers and children struggled to adapt to a new normal, those needing mental health services re-emerged. The strain of uncertainty, fear, isolation, depression, anxiety, and frustration took its toll and has not let up.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted, "emergency rooms have seen a 24 percent increase in mental health-related visits from children ages 5 to 11 compared to last year (2019). The increase among older kids is even higher — 31 percent." Rates of suicidal thinking and behavior were up by 25 percent or more from similar periods in 2019, according to researchers with the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Close to 3,000 behavioral health patients and their families were seen in the Emergency Department last year. The PIRC team received more than 1,700 calls statewide. Overall, PIRC provided services to almost 5,000 callers and patients.

We are grateful that our community and individual partners were with us every step of the way. The Anne B. LaRussa Foundation of Hope continued its substantial support of children's mental health care and access, as did Hill Crest Foundation with its ongoing three-year financial commitment. Walker Area Community Foundation provided significant support with a \$10,000 yearly donation. And, charitable individuals donated to the PIRC who believe in our mission. With those very generous donations, the PIRC continues to provide greater access to and support of children and their caregivers.

Thanks to each of you for being a hero to Children's and those you serve. We remain champions for better children's behavioral healthcare especially in such uncertain times.

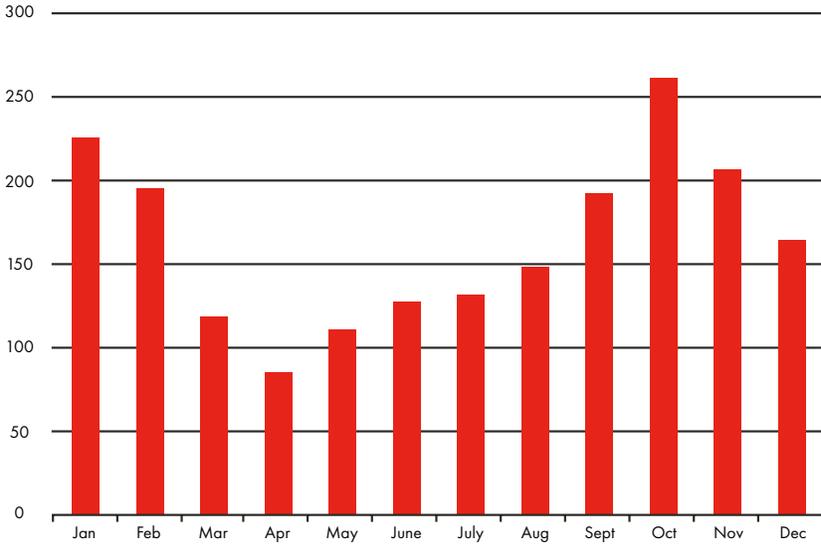
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia M. Jones".

Cynthia "Cindy" M. Jones, MA, LPC-S, NCC  
PIRC Director, Children's of Alabama

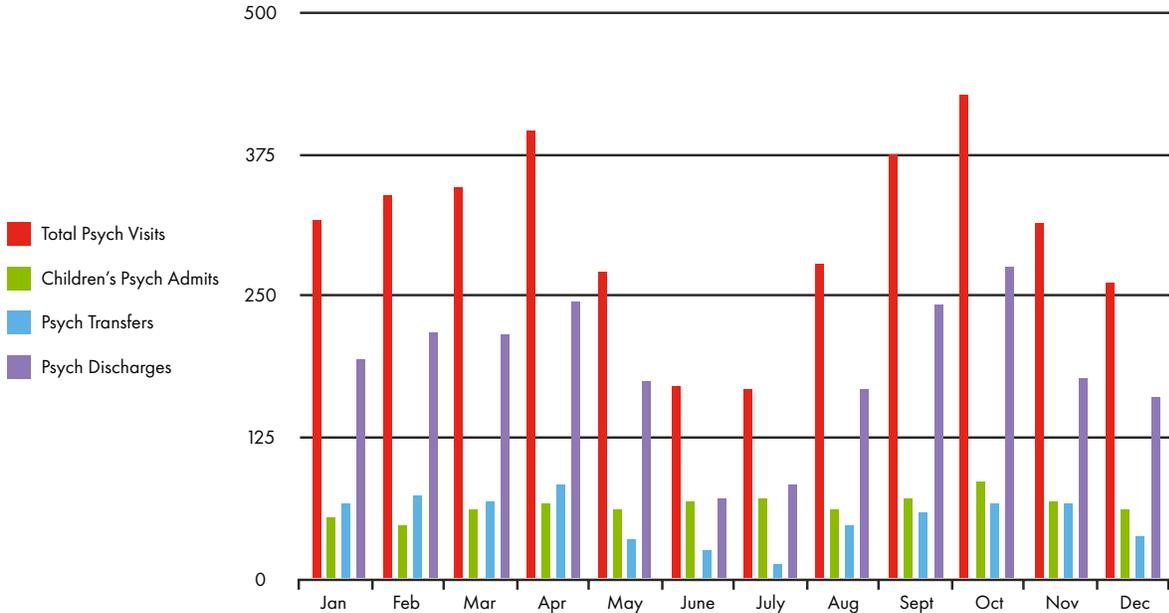
# PIRC Statistics

## Total PIRC Calls



*PIRC Therapist David Dees helps a caller find child and adolescent mental health providers in the caller's community.*

## Total Emergency Department Psychiatric Consults



# PIRC Team



*PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez and PIRC Therapist Susan Smith provide crisis interventions to patients and families in Children's Emergency Department.*



*The pandemic negatively impacted children's mental and behavioral health, but the PIRC remained committed to providing the best services possible to those who need it most.*

The biggest challenge to the PIRC/Psychiatric Consult team was understanding how to safely address behavioral and mental health concerns during the pandemic that upended children and caregivers' lives. Many children and families were in crisis and needed our help and direction. The team did an amazing job of evaluating and addressing concerns and connecting patients and callers to the most appropriate resources.

Of the nearly 2,000 PIRC calls, 64% of the callers received new provider information and 12% were recommended to the nearest emergency department. Of the almost 3,000 patients who presented to Children's Emergency Department, 32% were admitted to Children's of Alabama for treatment and 19% were transferred to another hospital for inpatient services, totaling 51%. The demand was greater than our capacity.

For those needing outpatient services, expanding and updating the PIRC provider database would allow the team to have up-to-date information on mental health providers throughout the state. Efforts were focused on larger and targeted counties such as Baldwin, Houston, Lee, Mobile, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa counties. Not only did we expand and update those counties, the team did so in every Alabama county, all 67. The database now has more than 1,500 providers. Specialties focused on were substance use providers, long-term residential facilities, grief support programs, and federally qualified health centers.

Another goal was to complete 50% of all follow up calls one week after the initial call to determine if contact was made with a provider and address any identified barriers. The team successfully met the goal. Plans are to increase follow up calls in 2021.

The PIRC team surveyed a sample of mental health providers in the database to gain feedback on the effectiveness of PIRC recommendations. Of the respondents, 75% said PIRC recommendations were appropriate for their practice. When asked about barriers that exist in their communities preventing children from receiving appropriate mental health services, the most common response was a lack of qualified mental health providers.

Another focus in 2020 was to continue collaboration and support of behavioral health initiatives at Children's of Alabama. One in particular is the PATHS Tele-Mental Health Program. PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez, PIRC Director Cindy Jones, and Nurse Practitioner Courtney Reeves presented two ECHO training sessions to rural pediatricians participating in the PATHS Tele-Mental Health Program. The focus was on assessing suicidality in pediatric patients and managing patients in crisis.

The PIRC team, faced with many challenges during the pandemic, managed to safely adapt and stay focused on the mission of caring for children and families' mental and behavioral health needs.

# PIRC Team



PIRC Therapist Matt Foster talks to a caller about behavioral and mental health resources. The PIRC team received more than 1,700 calls statewide.



PIRC Therapist Shannon Messina interviews a patient in the emergency department. Close to 3,000 patients and families were seen by the PIRC/Psychiatric Consult team.

## PIRC Administrators and Directors

**William Michael “Mike” Warren Jr.**, President and Chief Executive Officer\*

**Thomas “Tom” G. Shufflebarger, FACHE**, Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer\*

**William “Bill” Brodie, III, MHA, RN**, Behavioral Health Division Director

**Jesse Tobias “Toby” C. Martinez Jr., MD**, Assistant Professor, UAB, Medical Director of Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) and Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry

**Cynthia “Cindy” M. Jones, LPC-S, NCC**, Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) Director

*\*Mike Warren retired from Children’s of Alabama and Tom Shufflebarger was named President and CEO effective June 1, 2021.*

## PIRC Mental Health Therapists

**Summer Baker, LMFT**

**Susan Bennett-Smith, LICSW, PIP**

**Ahmad Brewer, LICSW, PIP**

**Cristal Cummings, LPC-S**

**David Dees, LMSW**

**Matt Foster, LPC**

**Jalana Johnson, LPC**

**Carmen Lambert, LMSW**

**Naren Leopard, LICSW, PIP**

**Shannon Messina, LICSW**

**Tahuna Rembert, ALC**

**Jamie Thompson, LICSW**

**Jermaine Wall, LICSW**

## PIRC Impact

- 1,796 calls for the year, averaging 150 calls a month
- 2,932 emergency department psychiatric consults, 51% requiring inpatient stabilization
- Increased database to more than 1,500 providers statewide
- 75% mental health providers surveyed said PIRC recommendations were appropriate for their practice.
- Follow up phone calls made to 50% of callers
- Greater community outreach to rural counties through PATHS Tele-Mental Health ECHO trainings, including Butler, Colbert, DeKalb, Dallas, Elmore, Escambia, Etowah, Lauderdale, Limestone, Macon, Mobile, Pike, St. Clair, Tallapoosa, Walker, and Washington counties.
- Virtual educational out-of-state outreach to Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas mental health providers.

# PIRC Advisory Committee

Members provided crucial guidance and direction to the PIRC on how to meet growing children's behavioral and mental health concerns during the pandemic.

**Kathy Atkins**, Inpatient Director of Behavioral Health, Children's of Alabama

**Brian Blakes**, Fire Chaplain, City of Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service

**Bill Brodie**, Division Director of Behavioral Health, Children's of Alabama

**Kyle Echols**, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Private Practice

**Joan Elder**, Education/Programs Coordinator and former President, NAMI Alabama

**Katrina Freeman**, Outpatient Director of Behavioral Health, Children's of Alabama

**Susan Griffin**, Director of Alternative Mental Health Services and Pediatric Tele-Mental Health Network Project Manager, Children's of Alabama

**Gus Heard-Hughes**, Vice President of Programs, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham

**Cindy Jones**, Director of Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC), Children's of Alabama

**Morissa Ladinsky**, Associate Professor of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, UAB and Children's of Alabama

**Leigh Long**, Director of Guidance, Homewood City Schools

**Jesse Tobias C. Martinez, Jr.**, Assistant Professor, UAB; and Director of Child Psychiatry Clinical Services and Medical Director of Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) and Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry, Children's of Alabama

**Lisa Maloney**, Director of Emergency Department, Children's of Alabama

**Kathy Monroe**, Professor and Division Director of Emergency Department, Children's of Alabama

**Artie Nelson**, Child, Adolescent, and Family Psychiatrist, Private Practice

**Kadie Peters**, Vice President of Community Impact Strategy and Resource Development, United Way of Central Alabama

**Robin Sparks**, Community Advocate

**Garland Stansell**, Chief Communications Officer, Children's of Alabama

**John Stone**, Government Relations Community Action Manager, Children's of Alabama

**Stacy White**, Administrative Director of Behavioral Health, Children's of Alabama



*Homewood City Schools Director of Guidance Leigh Long represents school administrators and their challenges as a member of the PIRC Advisory Committee.*

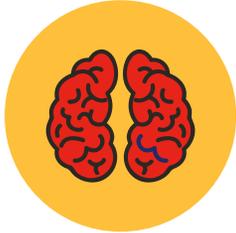
# PIRC Community Outreach

As invited speakers and exhibitors at a variety of events statewide and beyond, PIRC information was shared with:



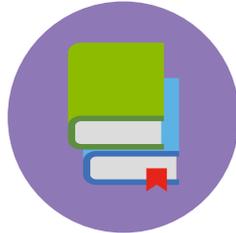
**2,032**

Medical Professionals



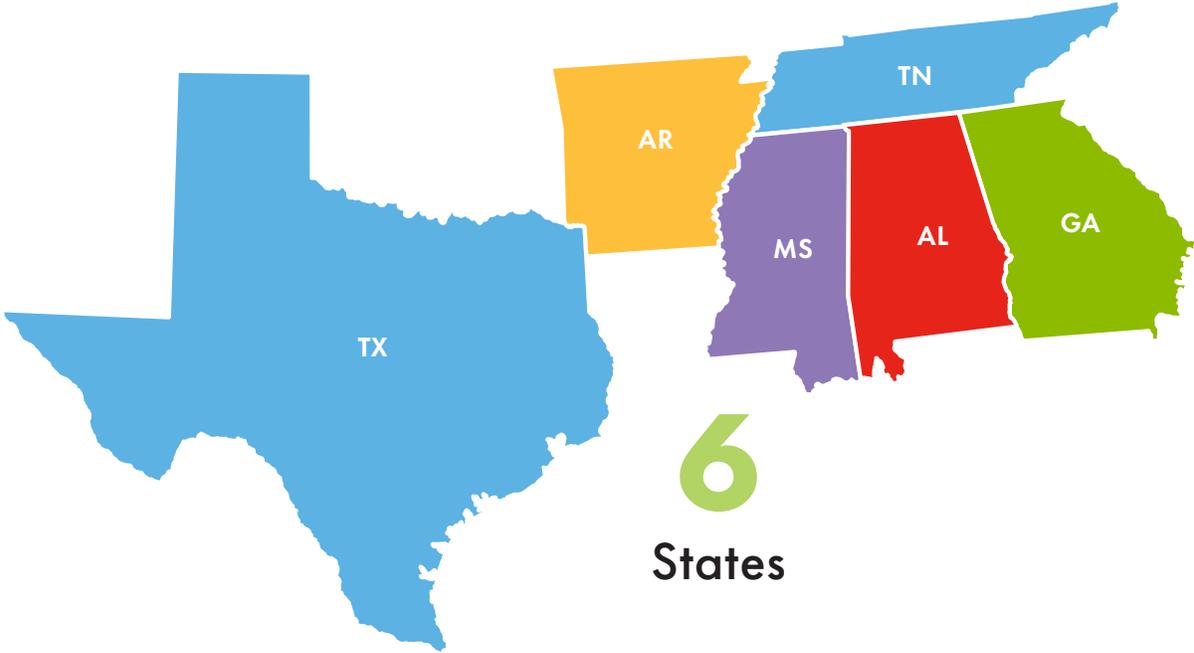
**1,440**

Mental Health Professionals



**4,715**

School Representatives



# PIRC Community Outreach



*Dr. Aleiya Butler, UAB Fellow, and Lynette Myers, PIRC Therapist, presented "What to Expect in the Emergency Room and How to Assess Students for Suicidal and/or Homicidal Ideations" to Birmingham City Schools administrators and counselors.*



*PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez speaks virtually to more than 550 nurses at the annual Children's of Alabama School Nurses Workshop on suicide prevention and assessment.*

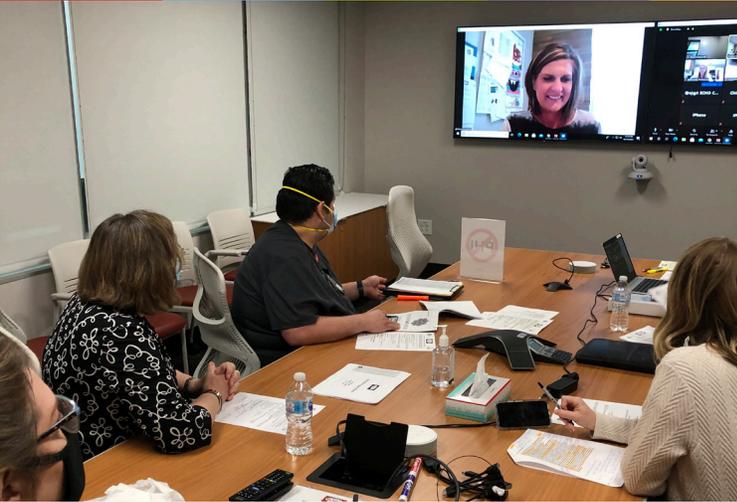
The pandemic limited PIRC's involvement in community outreach. However, virtual outreach granted access to those nationwide, statewide, and in counties with no prior outreach. The PIRC participated in 39 events, totaling 69 hours.

## Schools

One of the greatest impacts of the pandemic was seen in schools. Early spring, children were asked to attend school either remotely or alternate days of in-school or in-home classes, putting stress on the caregivers and children. Children were isolated from their peers, had less structure, faced uncertainty about the future, and lacked support services especially for children with autism or developmental delays. This dramatically increased anxiety, depression, and suicide risk in many children.

- **Birmingham City Schools:** Dr. Aleiya Butler, UAB Fellow, and Lynette Myers, PIRC Therapist, presented "What to Expect in the Emergency Room and How to Assess Students for Suicidal and/or Homicidal Ideations" to school administrators and counselors. PIRC continues its partnership with the fourth-largest school system in Alabama, comprised of 42 schools servicing 99 neighborhoods with more than 22,000 students.
- **Jefferson County Schools:** PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez and PIRC Director Cindy Jones presented virtually to Jefferson County School Principals on "Dealing with Increased Anxiety of Parents and Children" in preparation for the 2020-21 school year. Jefferson County Schools represent the second-largest school district in Alabama, serving more than 36,000 students in 57 different schools.
- **WBHM Radio:** PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez participated in WBHM's radio broadcast, "Reopening Schools: A Virtual Town Hall." There were 150 people in attendance from central Alabama. Dr. Martinez participated on a panel about mental health challenges facing children and caregivers in the coming school year.
- **Children's of Alabama School Nurse Workshop:** This was the third year PIRC presented at the annual School Nurse Workshop. PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez spoke virtually to more than 550 nurses statewide on suicide prevention and assessment.

# PIRC Community Outreach



*PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez and PIRC Director Cindy Jones participates with PATHS Tele-Mental Health ECHO Team during a training session for rural pediatricians.*



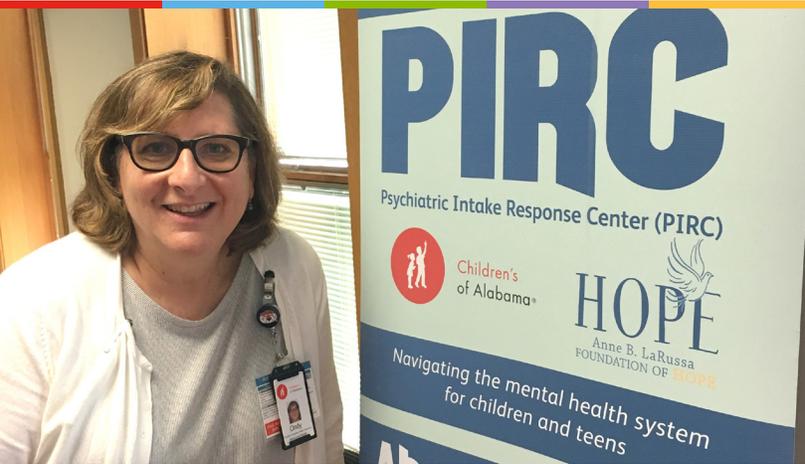
*PIRC Therapist Jalana Johnson shares information on PIRC services to one of 40 attendees at the Alabama Chapter of NAPNAP (National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners) conference at UAB School of Nursing.*

## Mental Health/Healthcare Providers

Outreach to community health and mental health providers is essential. Knowing PIRC services are available to them and caregivers connects patients to the right mental health services sooner.

- **Practical Day of Pediatrics Conference:** A PIRC therapist represented the PIRC at the Practical Day of Pediatrics conference. More than 100 pediatricians attended this annual event sponsored by Children's of Alabama and UAB in collaboration with the Jefferson County Pediatric Society.
- **PATHS Tele-Mental Health Program:** Children's of Alabama PATHS Tele-Mental Health Program offers ECHO mental health training to rural pediatricians who participate in the program. This year, PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez, PIRC Director Cindy Jones, and Psychiatric Consult Team Nurse Practitioner Courtney Reeves participated in ECHO sessions on assessing suicidality in pediatric patients and managing patients in crisis.
- **Central Alabama Pediatrician Practices:** PIRC Director Cindy Jones and PIRC Therapist Lynette Myers developed a handout on "Psychiatric Emergencies and What to Expect in the Emergency Room," which was provided to more than 40 pediatricians in central Alabama as well as patients and families in Children's of Alabama's Emergency Department. The handout was designed to guide practitioners and parents on steps to take when a child is in crisis. The information was later developed into a video which is available hospital wide.
- **Alabama Chapter of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) Conference:** PIRC Therapist Jalana Johnson provided information about PIRC services to 40 attendees at the Alabama Chapter of NAPNAP conference held at UAB's School of Nursing.
- **Central Alabama Nurse Practitioners Conference:** PIRC Therapist David Dees attended the conference of 100 nurse practitioners and shared information about PIRC services.
- **Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA) Conference:** The PIRC sponsored the Alabama Counseling Association's virtual annual conference. About 800 counselors attended this statewide conference.
- **Children's of Alabama Mental Health Awareness Conference:** PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez presented "Lessons from 2020: Children's Mental Health & Self-care" to 255 mental health professionals statewide.
- **Mental Health Roundtable (MHR):** PIRC Director Cindy Jones participated in and educated members of the roundtable about the PIRC. The organization fosters collaboration among more than 100 health systems representatives, mental health providers, faith-based entities, and stakeholders in the Birmingham metro area.

# PIRC Community Outreach



PIRC Director Cindy Jones presents on PIRC services to Walker County professionals and community members at its annual training day for non-profit companies in February.



President and CEO Mike Warren safely distances with a child at Children's of Alabama.

## Community Events

Many community events were either canceled or reimaged in a virtual format to accommodate the need for social distancing. Ironically, this provided a broader platform to reach communities about specific mental and behavioral health concerns and solutions.

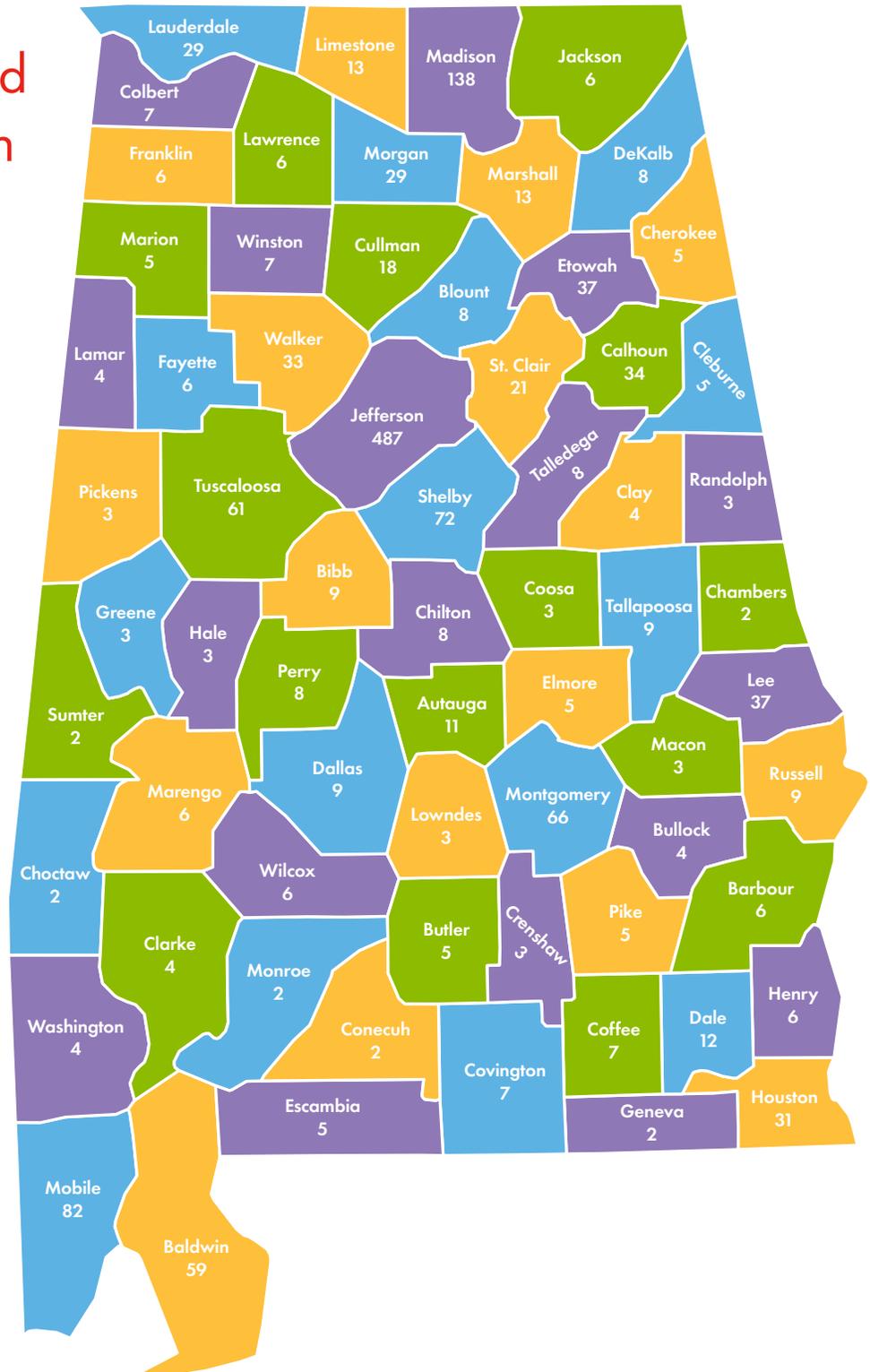
- **Walker Area Community Foundation:** In early 2020, PIRC Director Cindy Jones presented on PIRC services to Walker County professionals and community members at its annual training day for non-profit companies. The foundation generously donated \$10,000 to the PIRC in late 2020. The foundation supports all aspects of community service, including mental health care for children.
- **Huntsville Special Needs Expo:** Each year, Special Needs Expos are scheduled throughout the state in support of children and families with special needs. Albert Schweitzer Fellow Rahul Gaini represented the PIRC at the Huntsville event in February. More than 200 participated.
- **Babytalk(s):** Mental Health for Families During COVID-19 Podcast: PIRC Director Cindy Jones participated in a panel discussion with three Birmingham area mental health professionals on how parents and caregivers cope with the challenges of the pandemic.
- **Bradford Health Services:** PIRC Medical Director Dr. Tobias Martinez and PIRC Director Cindy Jones offered two virtual webinars on self-injurious behavior and suicidality in teens. About 300 mental health professionals and caregivers participated, representing six states in the southeast and southwest. One of the webinars was part of Ft. Benning, Ga.'s parenting series.
- **Vestavia Rotary Club:** PIRC Director Cindy Jones presented information about the PIRC and the impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health in Alabama.
- **Birmingham CBS 42 Special:** Mental Health Matters: PIRC Director Cindy Jones was interviewed as part of a 30-minute, TV special on the state of children's mental health. Jones talked about the PIRC and local behavioral health services to support children and families.
- **UAB Mental Health Resources Fair:** For the second year, the PIRC participated in UAB's mental health fair held virtually for its 23,000 employees statewide.

# PIRC Statistics

## PIRC-Identified Mental Health Providers by County\*

\*Totals indicate the number of mental health care providers identified in the PIRC database. Though providers may have multiple specialists on staff, the database recognizes the provider as one practice.

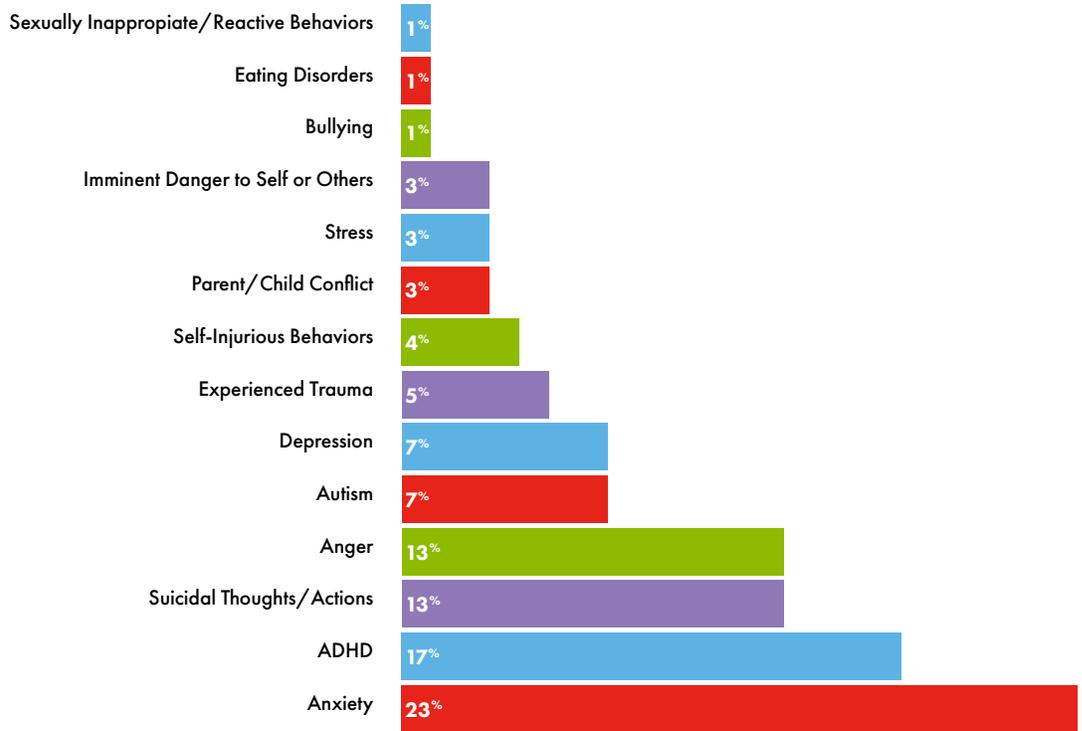
**TOTAL:**  
**1,519**



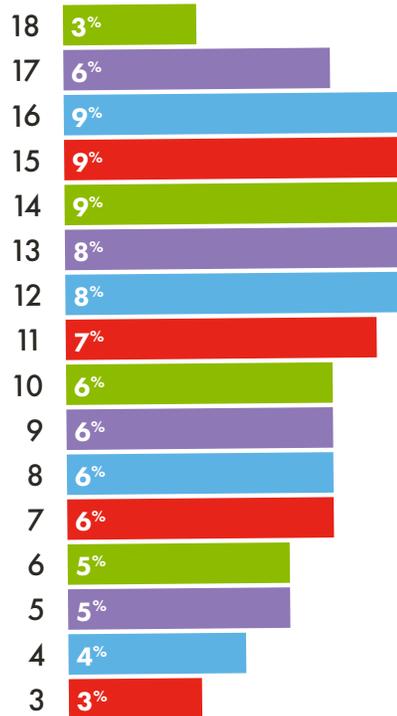


# PIRC Statistics

## Caller's Primary Concern

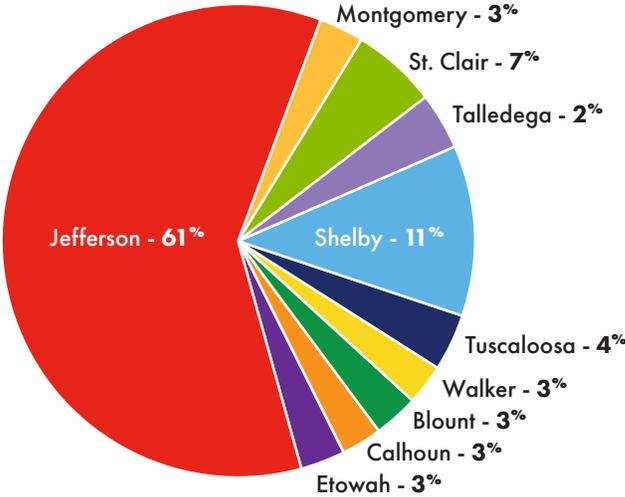


## Caller's Concerns by Ages

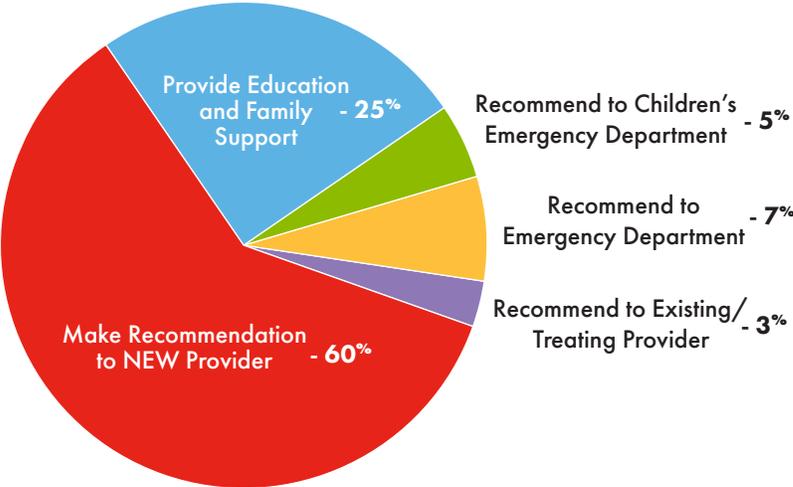


# PIRC Statistics

## Top 10 Counties by Caller

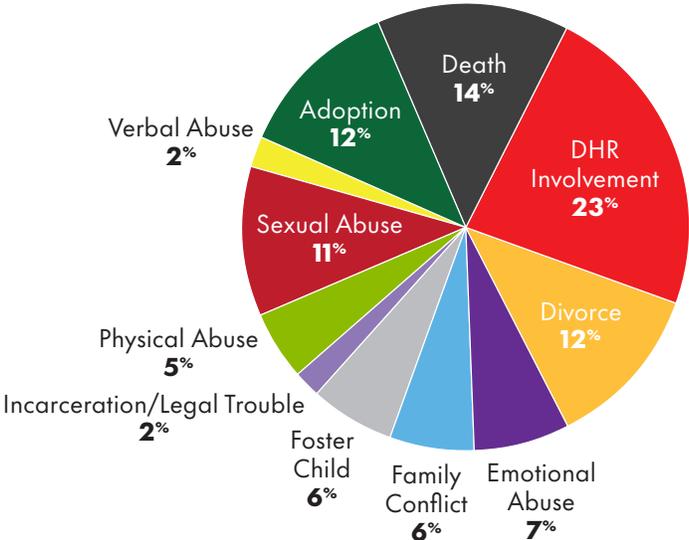


## Caller's Disposition Profile

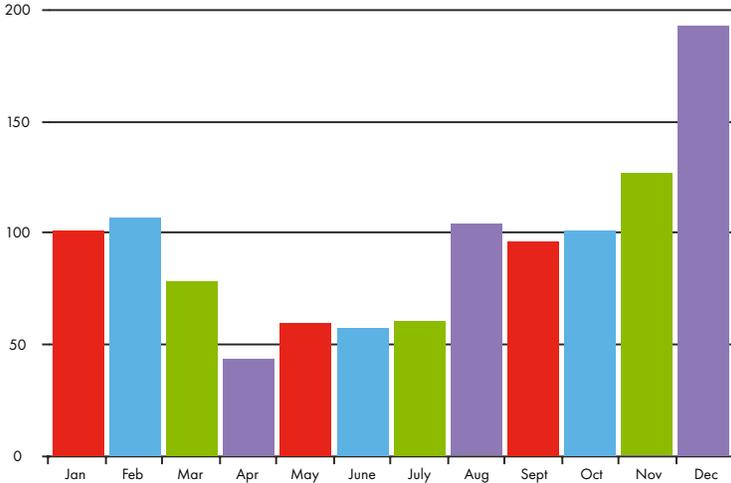


# PIRC Statistics

## Caller's Psychosocial Indicators



## Follow Up Calls



# Future Plans



Many LGBTQ teens found their mental health was "poor" most of the time or always during COVID-19, according to The Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.



Children's behavioral and mental health remains a priority and focus at Children's of Alabama.

Children's behavioral and mental health remains one of society's greatest concerns. The pandemic forced everyone to recognize children were in crisis before and even more so now. However, the silver lining has been a call to greater innovation through tele-health and virtual platforms, integrated primary care, more school consultations, and digital coping tools to assist children. Trends in children's behavioral healthcare show how many are responding to the need:

- More mental health training for medical professionals
- Enhancing social services to bolster families
- Building resilience in people and communities
- Advocating for payer reimbursements of alternative platforms
- Asking for payments to be tied to outcomes
- Exploring sustainability: Funding allocations, workforce development, interagency collaborations, and inviting parents to the table where decisions are made

## 2021 Goals

The PIRC's 2021 goals are focused on these trends: community, sustainability, and growth. The PIRC will continue its partnership with PATHS Tele-Mental Health program and will join the hospital's safety and education initiatives in schools by including mental health education.

Children's of Alabama is a good steward of the community, and likewise, the PIRC will continue seeking funding opportunities to support its services. As of this writing, the PIRC will receive yearly funding from the United Way's Annual General Allocation to the hospital.

Feedback from our communities informs us as to how well we're doing. The team will increase PIRC follow up calls from 50 to 60% in order to become more responsive to barriers that may be preventing callers from connecting with providers. And, with demand increasing, the PIRC will continue to foster a strong partnership with Children's Emergency Department and identify ways to improve services to behavioral health patients.



Psychiatric Intake Response Center • Children's of Alabama Emergency Department

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[ChildrensAL.org/PIRC](http://ChildrensAL.org/PIRC)