



Children's  
of Alabama®

## INSIDE PEDIATRICS

### PIRC HELPS FAMILIES NAVIGATE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

A new service at Children's of Alabama aims to help patients, families and providers better navigate the mental health care system. Children's and the Anne B. LaRussa Foundation of Hope have established the Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC). The PIRC is located in Children's Emergency Department and opened March 1. Licensed mental health clinicians via telephone or in person assess a child or teen's mental, emotional and behavioral needs, and recommend the best treatment options.

Anyone with a mental health question or concern regarding a child or adolescent is encouraged to contact the PIRC at 205-638-PIRC (7472). The PIRC is open seven days a week, year-round from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Via telephone, clinicians can match patients and their families with mental health services and providers in a five-county area (Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, Blount and Walker), assess risk factors, answer questions about mental health issues and provide community resource information and safety planning for future crises.

"The PIRC is only one of three in the country – the others being in Cincinnati and Akron, Ohio. It's a tremendous opportunity for Children's of Alabama to offer an innovative and much-needed mental health service to those in the community," said PIRC Director Cindy Jones, who, with Children's Behavioral Health Administrative Director Stacy White, spent a year and a half planning the service. Tobias Martinez, M.D., serves as the PIRC medical director. "We provide access to a mental health professional who will guide and support them along the way. The response from the community, including Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner Lynn Beshear, has been extremely supportive," Jones said.

Added Martinez, "There is a nationwide trend of increased volume of pediatric psychiatric visits to emergency rooms. Our program's mission is to help guide patients and their families to the most appropriate level of care."

For high-risk children and teens who may need services in Children's Emergency Department, the PIRC will provide crisis evaluations on a first-come, first-served basis, considering treatment room availability and urgency. Patients will be assessed by a mental health team of board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrists, fellows, nurse practitioners, registered nurses and PIRC staff to determine the appropriate level of care. The PIRC does not provide over-the-phone diagnoses or psychiatric evaluations, over-the-phone scheduling or rescheduling of outpatient appointments, home visits, transportation or prescriptions or refills.

Clinicians emphasize the PIRC is not a suicide hotline, but instead a valuable resource for parents, teachers, counselors, grandparents, foster parents or anyone who is seeking mental health services on a child's behalf. Anyone experiencing a crisis should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. Anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts should call the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

For more information about the PIRC, visit [childrensal.org/psychiatric-intake-response-center](http://childrensal.org/psychiatric-intake-response-center).



From left, Robin Sparks Davis, executive director of the Anne B. LaRussa Foundation of Hope, talks with PIRC Director Cindy Jones, Children's Behavioral Health Administrative Director Stacy White and Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner Lynn Beshear, during Beshear's visit to Children's Feb. 2.