



Department of Mental Health: Jefferson County needs new plan for community services

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By **Hannah Wolfson -- The Birmingham News**



Alabama Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A core group of psychiatric professionals, advocates and consumers has been tasked with designing a plan to build up community mental health services in Jefferson County before **the state's mental hospitals close.**

That decision came out of a Friday meeting with members of the mental health community and representatives of the **Department of Mental Health.**

Exactly who will serve has not yet been determined, but the group has a tight deadline. Tammy Peacock, associate commissioner for mental health and substance abuse services, said a basic plan needs to be drafted by the end of March.

Alabama Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh **announced last month** that the department would close four of its five largest mental hospitals in response to the state's budget crisis, eliminating about 525 psychiatric beds.

That translates to about 2,000 patients per year statewide, about 400 of them from Jefferson County, estimated Richard Craig, executive director of the Jefferson-Blount-St.Clair Mental Health Authority.

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