



A Statewide Partnership for a Healthier, Happier and More Hopeful Arkansas

COMMITTEE BRIEFING PACKET

Prepared for the Arkansas House and Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committees

Tuesday, September 1, 2026 • 1:00 PM

Room A • Big MAC Building

Testifying

Tanya Phillips, M.Ed., M.H.Sc.

Founder and President • Health Educator and Advocate

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An initiative of Reinventing Ourselves, an Arkansas 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

Executive Summary

The Arkansas Wellness Network (AWN) is a nonpartisan statewide network created to connect policymakers, healthcare systems, public agencies, verified providers, community organizations and Arkansans around a shared purpose: promoting health, happiness and hope throughout Arkansas and helping our state become known as not only the Natural State, but also the Healthy State.

AWN operates as an initiative of Reinventing Ourselves, an Arkansas 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. While the concept stems from eighteen years of working with various organizations, the Arkansas Wellness Network officially launched in January 2026 in response to a longstanding challenge: Arkansas has many dedicated people and valuable programs, but health information, community resources and opportunities for collaboration are often fragmented across systems, regions and issue areas.

LONG-TERM VISION

Move Arkansas from 49th towards first by connecting existing strengths, expanding prevention and making credible resources easier to find and use.

What AWN brings

- A neutral table where legislators, healthcare leaders, providers, agencies and community members can work across political and professional boundaries.
- Public education through Arkansas Wellness Magazine, podcasts, book clubs, support groups, events and statewide challenges.
- A credential-verification process for participating wellness providers, including a third-party background check and verification of relevant licenses or certifications.
- A developing statewide searchable resource-navigation database that can help residents find services while helping leaders identify geographic and service gaps.
- Programming that fosters networking for and promotion of our state's verified wellness providers and businesses
- Training resources to support members continuing education for licensure and certification

Why Coordinated Action Is Needed

America's Health Rankings placed Arkansas 49th overall in its 2025 Annual Report. The overall rank is a composite based on 50 weighted measures across five categories: health outcomes, social and economic factors, physical environment, behaviors and clinical care. The ranking is a long-term benchmark—not an outcome any single organization can change alone.

Indicator	Arkansas finding
Overall health rank	49th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Physical inactivity	47th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report. 28.5% of adults reported no physical activity or exercise outside their regular job.
Obesity	Ranked 3rd highest state for obesity in the Trust for America's Health's <i>State of Obesity 2024</i> report . 40% of Arkansans were classified as obese in 2024. Obesity is a major risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions.
Cardiovascular Disease	47th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Diabetes	46th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Frequent Physical Distress	49th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Maternal Mortality	43rd among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report
Infant Mortality	51st out of 52 jurisdictions (Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico) in the 2025 March of Dimes Arkansas Report Card
Teen Birth	49th overall among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings
Mental Health	49th for frequent mental distress, 40th for depression among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Domestic Violence	45th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Homicide Rates	45th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.
Suicide Rates	45th for ages 35-44, 44th for males, 40th overall among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report
Life expectancy	73.6 years in Arkansas compared with 76.1 years nationally, using 2021 data in the Arkansas Red County Report. County disparity: Benton County: 78.2 years. Phillips County: 67.2 years—a difference of 11 years. Thirty-seven of Arkansas's 75 counties were classified as Red Counties, with life expectancy below 72.3 years.
Dental Visits	47th among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report. (48th for dental providers)
Smoking	47th for smoking and 46th for e-cigarette use among the 50 states in the 2025 America's Health Rankings Annual Report.

Sources: America's Health Rankings 2025 Annual Report; Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Red County Report, October 2023, Trust for America's Health's State of Obesity 2024 report, 2025 March of Dimes Arkansas Report Card

The Arkansas Wellness Network

The Arkansas Wellness Network is a network of people and organizations working together at every level to promote health, happiness and hope throughout Arkansas. It was created to support whole-person wellness, prevention and earlier intervention while respecting the essential roles of licensed healthcare professionals, hospitals, public agencies and policymakers.

AWN's role is not to treat disease, replace healthcare systems or claim sole credit for statewide outcomes. Its appropriate role is to strengthen the conditions that make improvement possible: awareness, credible education, participation, navigation, communication and cross-sector coordination.

Organizational foundation

Area	Current foundation
Legal structure	An initiative of Reinventing Ourselves, an Arkansas 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
Governance	Board oversight with experience in health education, law and integrative medicine.
Provider standards	Participating wellness providers complete a third-party background check and verify relevant licenses or certifications.
Academic/health collaboration	Reinventing Ourselves maintains two memoranda of understanding with UAMS and has operated a virtual TBI survivor book club/support group plus a Mindfulness Meditation Course in conjunction with UAMS for over a year. We have more initiatives in development with national and statewide institutions and organizations.
Public engagement	Magazines, podcasts, educational programming, events, courses, support groups and statewide challenges.

Nonpartisan commitment

AWN welcomes good-faith participation across party lines and does not exist to advance a political party or candidate. At the Arkansas Wellness Summit, all members of the Public Health Committee were invited without regard to party affiliation, and opposing candidates for the same office were both invited to participate in the public conversation.

- AWN seeks practical, evidence-informed solutions from across the political spectrum.
- Participation in an AWN event does not constitute an endorsement of a candidate, party, organization or policy position.
- AWN will share community experience, education and data while respecting the legislature's policymaking authority.

Collaborative relationships

AWN and Reinventing Ourselves have worked with or developed collaborative relationships with organizations across healthcare, public safety, veterans' services and community support. Examples include UAMS, Baptist Health, the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, MEMS, the Arkansas State Police Wellness Unit, We Are The 22 and The Kitchen Table. The nature and formality of each relationship varies by program.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

We are not trying to replace good work. We are trying to help good work connect, become visible and reach the people it was created to serve.

Arkansas Wellness Summit: What We Heard

The Arkansas Wellness Summit convened legislators, healthcare professionals, wellness providers, first responders, educators, nonprofit leaders and community advocates around one question: How do we work together to move Arkansas from 49th towards first?

Shared legislative themes

Theme	Summit takeaway
Prevention	Earlier intervention can improve lives and may reduce avoidable long-term costs.
Access	Transportation, distance, affordability, reimbursement and workforce availability shape whether care is realistically reachable.
Patient choice	Policies should respect appropriate clinical decision-making and the relationship between patients and qualified providers.
Community voice	Legislators need practical solutions, credible data, estimated costs or savings and direct input from those doing the work.
Bipartisan action	Many health priorities cross party lines when the focus remains on access, outcomes, accountability and Arkansas families.

Shared community themes

Theme	Summit takeaway
Whole-person health	Transportation, housing, finances, relationships, purpose and social connection can determine whether someone remains well or reaches crisis.
Care coordination	Patients and families are too often left to navigate disconnected institutions and programs on their own.
Community-based care	Home visits and trusted local partnerships can reveal barriers that are invisible during a traditional appointment.
High-risk workforces	Veterans, first responders and military families benefit from confidential, culturally informed and peer-supported pathways.
Rural reach	A service must be available, affordable, appropriate, trusted and realistically reachable—not merely listed somewhere.

COLLECTIVE CONCLUSION

Arkansas does not lack people who care. The next step is to connect existing efforts, identify what is missing and turn shared concern into coordinated action.

Current and Planned Initiatives

AWN uses education, storytelling, peer connection and community participation to make whole-person wellness practical and visible. The status of each initiative is shown below.

Status	Initiatives
Operating now	Arkansas Wellness Magazine; wellness podcast programming; verified wellness-provider network; ArkansasWellnessNetwork.org; statewide resource-database development; TBI survivor virtual book club/support group and Mindfulness Meditation Courses in conjunction with UAMS.
Events Hosted in 2026	Statewide self-care retreat and the Arkansas Wellness Summit.
Launching September 2026	Veterans and First Responders virtual Book Club/Support Group, being developed with We Are The 22, The Kitchen Table, Tactical Wellness and MEMS.
Proposed for October 2026	Expecting and New Moms virtual Book Club/Support Group; AWN is seeking appropriate maternal- and infant-health partners.
Launching January 2027	Arkansas Wellness Challenge and Arkansas Future Wellness Leadership Challenge.

Arkansas Wellness Challenge

An eight-week statewide initiative combining individual habit-building with friendly, population-weighted competition between Arkansas cities. Participants can log movement, nutritious meals, water, mindfulness, time outdoors, volunteerism, and other whole-person wellness activities in addition to attendance at city and business sponsored wellness classes and events. Population weighting allows smaller cities to compete fairly. The city and business collaboration is intended to get all local wellness businesses involved within the eight weeks focusing on the eight dimensions of wellness: physical, nutritional, financial, emotional, relational, contributonal, spiritual, and environmental.

Arkansas Healthy Future Challenge

A student-centered challenge inviting middle school, high school, college, university, community college, trade-school and technical-program students to either create evidence-based wellness education and practical community solutions or study various careers in the wellness industry. Projects may include public-service announcements, toolkits, community guides, student wellness programs and locally relevant campaigns. By building a better awareness of various careers in the wellness industry, we hope to encourage young people in Arkansas to consider these careers for their future.

Book clubs and support groups

Free, short, and accessible educational materials can help people learn together, reduce isolation, build health literacy and connect with qualified experts. These programs are educational and supportive; they do not replace medical care, diagnose conditions or provide clinical referrals.

Community Engagement

Committee members, state agencies, cities, schools, hospitals and community organizations will be invited to participate in and help promote the January 2027 challenges, identify local contacts and ensure rural communities have a meaningful path to participate.

Statewide Resource Navigation

Arkansas has many valuable directories and resource lists, but they are often separated by agency, population, health condition or service category. People in need may not know which organization maintains the appropriate list—or that a relevant service exists at all.

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM

If people do not know a resource exists, they do not know to ask for it. If Arkansas does not understand what exists and where, it cannot accurately identify its gaps.

The AWN's Tech Infrastructure

AWN has built searchable database functionality into ArkansasWellnessNetwork.org. The system is in an early demonstration phase and currently includes AWN member information. AWN plans to add approximately 50–100 reviewed public resources across several priority categories.

- Search by location, category, provider or organization name.
- Include public programs, hotlines, websites, hospitals, nonprofits, community services and verified wellness providers.
- Begin with traumatic brain injury; mental health and crisis support; maternal and family support; veterans and first responders; essential needs; and physical wellness and chronic-disease prevention.
- Allow the public and organizations to report corrections, with review before any listing is changed.
- Display a last-reviewed date and work toward review cycles of approximately three to six months.

Information fields to standardize

Core field	Purpose
Categories	Wellness business, verified wellness provider, community resource, hotline
Subcategories	By topic or professional service: Brain Injury, Pregnancy, Autism, Domestic Violence, Medical Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Massage Therapist, Naturopath, Personal Trainer
Details	Phone, website, email address and description of business or services
Links	Links to social media or websites
Address	Searchable by location/map

AWN provides public information and navigation support; it does not make clinical referrals, guarantee availability, or replace emergency services, professional judgment or existing agency responsibilities.

How AWN will measure its contribution

The overall state rank will remain a long-term benchmark, but AWN will evaluate its own work using measures it can reasonably influence and document.

- Counties and communities represented in programs and listening sessions.
- Resources entered, reviewed and updated; organizations contributing data; and identified service gaps.
- Challenge registrations, community participation, completion and healthy activities logged.
- Book-club and support-group enrollment, attendance, retention and participant feedback.
- User-reported ability to locate credible information and understand available options.

OUR POSITION

If the State already has the ability and infrastructure to build or unify this system, AWN wants to help. Our concern is not who owns it. Our concern is that Arkansans can find and use it.

Witnesses and Sources

Tanya Phillips, M.Ed., M.H.Sc.

Tanya Phillips is the Founder and President of the Arkansas Wellness Network and Reinventing Ourselves. She holds a Master of Education and a Master of Health Science in Health and Human Performance. A disabled combat veteran who served in Iraq, Phillips is a health educator and former Arkansas Suicide Prevention Program Manager. Her experience navigating physical and mental injuries—and later trying to identify resources for Arkansans in crisis—shaped AWN’s focus on prevention, whole-person wellness and resource visibility.

Tyler Phillips, J.D.

Tyler Phillips serves as Vice President of the Arkansas Wellness Network. An attorney, former Arkansas Razorback football player, volunteer high school football coach and health and wellness advocate, he supports AWN’s governance, nonpartisan engagement and efforts to connect policy, prevention and community participation.

Dr. Kathy Lenahan, OTD, MS, OTR/L

Dr. Kathy Lenahan is the founder of Alta Integrated Wellness, a certified Veteran-Owned, Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned, Woman-Owned small business, offering community-based occupational therapy services under the Whole Health Model of Care. She holds a Doctorate and Masters of Science in Occupational Therapy and a certification in Healthcare Quality and Patient Safety. She completed an interprofessional, mental health VA fellowship in Psychosocial Rehabilitation with a focus on recovery-oriented services. Dr. Lenahan is a proud member of AWN and directly supports the mission of moving Arkansas from 49th to 1st in health.

Kanisha Sanders, RN, NC-BC

Kanisha Sanders is a Registered Nurse and National Board-Certified Nurse Coach with a clinical background in critical care nursing, currently serving as a NICU nurse. Kanisha has a professional focus on health promotion, prevention, and whole-person wellness. She is the Founder of THE RERISE, a health and wellness company focused on helping individuals and organizations translate health knowledge into sustainable, real-life practices. Through nurse coaching, wellness education, and community engagement, Sanders advocates for practical approaches that strengthen individual well-being, increase health awareness, and support healthier communities. Kanisha Sanders is a proud member of AWN, volunteering in many capacities including the efforts to support healthy moms and healthy babies.

Primary sources

- United Health Foundation. America’s Health Rankings 2025 Annual Report. Published January 2026.
<https://www.americashealthrankings.org/publications/reports/2025-annual-report>
- America’s Health Rankings. Physical Inactivity in Arkansas, 2024 data.
<https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/sedentary/AR>
- Arkansas Department of Health. Arkansas Red County Report, October 2023. Life-expectancy estimates use 2021 data.
- Trust for America’s Health. *State of Obesity 2024* report
- 2025 March of Dimes Arkansas Report Card

Contact

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Email Address	admin@reinventingourselves.org
Website	www.ArkansasWellnessNetwork.org
Mission	Promoting health, happiness and hope throughout Arkansas

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Moving Arkansas from 49th towards first will not happen through one organization, one event or one policy. It will happen when people throughout Arkansas work together—and remain accountable for turning partnership into measurable action.