



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

Behavioral Health Administration

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January 19, 2022

Dear Behavioral Health Provider Community:

The following includes our direction and advice, first shared February 2021, which we believe you will find valuable at this stage of the COVID response and recovery.

These recommendations were developed in direct response to multiple behavioral health provider surveys on the gaps and needs during the pandemic. Survey results are posted on the [BHA COVID Recovery webpage](#). Based on the common challenges reported in survey results, behavioral health treatment providers may want to consider the following as you continue to engage patients/consumers during the pandemic:

- To support challenges surrounding in-person services, we recommend that providers:
 - increase use of mail-order for medications whenever possible to reduce unnecessary trips to the pharmacy for patients;
 - communicate program safety protocols for in-person visits;
 - make sure PPE is available for patient visits, and ensure that patients are aware that PPE will be available to them before coming to their appointments;
 - use social media to communicate that programs are open for business; and
 - use all appropriate measures to keep patients safe during their appointment.

- There continue to be some **barriers to the utilization of telehealth**. We encourage providers to:
 - continue to explain to patients what telehealth is and how it works, particularly those with more impairing psychiatric conditions;
 - share resources, such as the [Telehealth Resource Guide](#) and our [Telehealth FAQs](#);
 - adjust your telehealth guidance and approach to accommodate patients who may find the use of technology intimidating;
 - document your explanation of telehealth to participants as well as their consent to its use (this can be verbal); and
 - be conscious of the importance of only using private telehealth options and NOT public-facing ones such as Facebook Live, Snapchat, etc.

- Recognizing that some **schools may be using virtual learning**, providers may want to:
 - consider increased accommodations for patients with childcare responsibilities (e.g., evening and weekend telehealth appointments).
- To respond to slight decreases in patients accessing or continuing **SUD treatment services** during the pandemic (and the associated increase in the relapse rates and fatal overdoses seen during CY2020), we recommend that providers:
 - embrace the use of, or increase the use of medication assisted treatment (such as buprenorphine or long-acting naltrexone) for the treatment of opioid use disorders in all behavioral health treatment settings;
 - increase harm-reduction messaging to patients in all treatment settings, especially for those at risk of relapse;
 - share information on [virtual supports](#), such as [online support groups](#) and [MD Mind Health](#) texts;
 - send appointment reminders between scheduled visits; and
 - communicate with patients between appointments to remind them to reach out if they're experiencing distress.
- To address the **significant disruption in daily activities** and the associated challenges for those with behavioral health conditions, we recommend that providers:
 - remind patients of their next appointment at the end of the current appointment and send appointment reminders before the next appointment;
 - remind patients to take medications as prescribed;
 - recommend that patients make more frequent appointments during difficult times;
 - if available, use peers for outreach to patients struggling to keep appointments or staying stable;
 - inform patients about warning signs for when they should request more frequent appointments, such as the return of symptoms or relapse;
 - push [mental health resources](#) to patients, including [MD Mind Health text messages](#) and [online virtual recovery groups](#); and
 - maintain regular screening for symptoms that may not have been present at intake, especially substance use, depression, grief, and anxiety.
- To support **your mental health**, we encourage you to join the following:
 - **BHA/MedChi Behavioral Health Webinar Series: Helping the Helpers and Those They Serve.** These webinars are for behavioral health and medical health care workers of all disciplines, designed to enhance both health care worker self-care and resultantly the care they provide, as health care workers combat numerous stressors including the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice issues, and other stressors that can potentially impact delivered care. Webinars take place on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Visit the [BHA/MedChi webinar webpage](#), for information and archived recordings.

BH Provider Community
RE: Provider Guidance
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- **Behavioral Health Provider Webinar with Public Health** (every other Friday at 10 a.m.)
Get regular updates on the pandemic in Maryland and get your questions answered. To join any of the webinars:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89345114259>
Or One tap mobile:
US: +13017158592,89345114259# or +19292056099,89345114259#
Or Telephone:
Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):
US: +1 301 715 8592 or +1 929 205 6099 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 253 215 8782
or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 6833
Webinar ID: 893 4511 4259
International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89345114259>
- **Explore [FAQs on Mental Health, Stress and Anxiety during COVID](#)**, including information for health care workers
- **Other mental health supports:**
 - [Trainings/Webinars for Providers](#)
 - [Archived Trainings/Webinars for Providers](#)
 - [Support Groups](#)
 - [Information Guides for Providers](#)

Additionally, please remind your patients that the HealthChoice COVID-19 Gift Card Program offers a vaccine incentive to enrollees for a limited time. [Learn more here](#) or [read the press release](#).

Thank you again for your continued efforts and hard work during this important time.

Sincerely,



Aliya Jones, M.D., MBA
Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health