



Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health Monthly Updates

June / July 2021

1. Administrative Services Organization

Optum Maryland continues to implement upgrades to the Incedo system. An ongoing system for introduction of planned releases has been implemented to ensure better prioritization and comprehensive testing of system upgrades. Release 6.4 was recently introduced, offering improved performance and clearer choices for authorizations, which are now filtered by provider type.

Many providers have already completed their review of claims from the estimated payment period (January to June 2020), and are now working with Optum on reconciling payments. Providers who have not yet done so are strongly encouraged to reach out to Optum's reconciliation team at maryland.provpymt@optum.com.

For more updates, please see the recent [Joint Chairman's Report enclosed](#).

2. Behavioral Health Integration (BHI)

The BHA continues to support the structural and process integration of local Behavioral health authorities and jurisdiction. We plan to work with the local jurisdiction to identify sustainable processes that will support integration.

3. BHA/MedChi Behavioral Health Webinar Series: Helping the Helpers and Those They Serve

The below webinars are open for registration. All webinars are from 5-6pm. Registration for future webinars, which are also on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month, will be posted on the [BHA/MedChi webinar webpage](#), where webinar recordings and slides are also archived.

- July 22: Stretching and Exercise for Stress Reduction. Cathy Mahon, PT, MS. Moderator: Kelley Stefancik, CRNP. [Register here](#).

4. BHA Friday Public Health Webinar for Providers on COVID-19 with MDH's Rebecca Perlmutter, MPH.

The schedule has changed from weekly to every other week. To join every other Friday at 10 a.m., starting on July 9, go to <https://mdhealth.webex.com/mdhealth/k2/j.php?MTID=t4fd2d9341eb2218059aa0282490f5fcf>. Then enter your name and email, enter the session password: K9Fp2D2hPNP, and click "Join Now". To be added to the calendar invite contact ivajean.smith@maryland.gov.

5. Maryland Crisis System Workgroup

The work continues, no specific update this month.

6. Mental Health Supports

I encourage you to revisit the [mental health supports](#) we created and compiled in response to the pandemic and share them with your patients, family and friends to help build community wellness.



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7. Multi-Agency Opioid Overdose Death Prevention Strategy Team

During the May meeting, MDH's Center for Harm Reduction Services (CHRS) discussed their new initiative with the Department of Parole and Probation (DPP) to make naloxone available to all citizens on parole and probation through their parole/probation case managers. At the June 23rd meeting BHA's Applied Research and Evaluation team shared data about overdose deaths in the Black community, and several jurisdictions reported how they are attempting to address. The OCC presented their SOS Strategy and shared highlights of the DORM report. Lastly, the Office of Population Health Improvement presented their 2019 Overdose Fatality Review Team annual report.

8. New Guidance and FAQs:

How can behavioral health providers increase vaccine access for those they serve?

Although there has been improvement (see #5 below), vaccination rates for individuals with behavioral health diagnoses continue to lag too far behind the general population. Vaccination is a matter of health equity and is part of the physical health and wellness care individuals we serve need to receive. Making vaccinations a one-stop process, located where someone is already receiving care from a trusted source, will be critical for getting more of those we serve vaccinated. Providers can become vaccinators through ImmuNet, can host vaccine clinics by partnering with pharmacies, mobile clinics or local health departments, or can work with BHA for vaccinations at their residential or congregate living facility sites. More details on some of the below are available in this [Provider Alert on How to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Acceptance Rates](#).

1. ImmuNet: To register to become a vaccinator, [see the ImmuNet Quick Reference Guides](#). Email questions about the program to mdh.mdimmunet@maryland.gov or call 410-767-6606. While the federal government provides the vaccine itself for free, providers can submit claims for vaccines they administer.
2. Hosting Vaccine Clinics On-Site with a Pharmacy or Mobile Clinic Partner, including for Residential and Congregate Living Facilities: If you are interested in hosting a vaccine clinic by having a pharmacy or mobile clinic come on-site, contact Wesley Huntemann at wesley.huntemann@maryland.gov.
3. To find a vaccination clinic at a hospital, local health department, or pharmacy, go to coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/vaccine#locator.
4. As of June 20th, for those served by the Maryland Public Behavioral Health System since January of 2020, the percentage who are fully vaccinated was 31% for those 12 and older, 33% for those 18 and older. Congratulations to Montgomery County for leading the way in both categories at 47% and 51% respectively.

Are there any restrictions still in place for returning to seeing patients in-person?

Behavioral health care has always been deemed essential so in-person care has always been allowed, but like other health care was subject to a mask mandate. On May 15, 2021, the



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statewide mask mandate was lifted to fall in line with the CDC's newly released guidance, but [per order of the Governor](#), mandatory mask-wearing continues in health care settings, as well as on public transportation and in schools. The CDC has provided updated guidance, [Healthcare Facilities: Managing Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), which includes ten ways healthcare systems can operate effectively during the pandemic. Maximizing vaccination rates of patients and staff is also critical.

Telehealth: The Governor's executive order on telehealth ended on July 1, 2021. However, [Senate Bill 3](#), entitled "Preserve Telehealth Act of 2021" that was passed during the 2021 legislative session took effect the same day. This bill requires an insurer, nonprofit health service plan, and health maintenance organization, to continue to provide coverage for telehealth services, regardless of the location of the patient at the time the services are provided. Additionally, coverage for behavioral health care services that are currently covered under a person's health insurance policy will also continue to be covered. Please see the "**BHA Telehealth Post Emergency**" and the "**Maryland Medicaid Provider Guidance**" documents for more specific details attached. If you have any questions or concerns, please email us at bha.inquiries@maryland.gov.

9. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program Workgroup

Training for PRP providers on compliance and other basic program management has been provided. More training will occur in the next month as technical support to providers.

10. Racial Disparities Task Force

The Racial Disparities in Overdose Task Force met on June 4. During this meeting, Task Force members examined county and ZIP-code-level hospital and fatalities data from the four jurisdictions where the largest number of African American fatalities are occurring (Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Prince George's County.)

The Task Force also welcomed Dr. Danielle German from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to discuss findings from the Statewide Ethnographic Assessment on Drug Use and Services (SEADS) study. The SEADS study was conducted in 2018 and aimed to:

1. Characterize drug use patterns and other factors contributing to risk of substance use-related mortality and morbidity at the local level.
2. Characterize existing service capacity (related to drug use and harm reduction),
3. Identify service gaps and approaches to addressing them, and
4. Assess existing infrastructure related to harm reduction services and the potential capacity for the expansion of harm reduction services. Information gleaned from these two data presentations will inform a brainstorming session on contributing factors leading to the increase in overdose deaths in the African American community.