**Ohio** | Department of Health
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

# Responding to the Behavioral Health Surge

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Behavioral health problems are among the most commonly experienced adverse health effects of a pandemic, and demand for services historically increases during a crisis. Almost everyone in the community where an infectious outbreak occurs will feel some type of emotional effect as general anxiety increases with fear of contamination and death, financial instability and loss, lifestyle changes, and uncertain futures. The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services remains committed to meeting the behavioral health needs of all Ohioans across the full continuum of care and services. Below is a brief summary of some of our efforts to meet the needs of Ohioans during this difficult time.

## Providing Real-Time Connection to Expert Help
- Launched the COVID CareLine to provide the public with access to licensed behavioral health professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the pandemic, via telephone
- Continue to promote and support the Crisis Text Line to provide free and confidential service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via text on mobile devices
- Expanded the OhioMHAS Toll-free Bridge line hours to ensure the public can access the behavioral health information that they need, when they need it

## Strengthening Behavioral Health Care Access
- Expanded OhioMHAS telehealth rules to ensure continued access to critical mental health and addiction services during the pandemic
- Providing technical assistance to behavioral health providers on clinical best practices for quality telehealth care
- Supporting peer providers through regular technical assistance, including the development of a comprehensive guide to Ohio's county resources
- Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and technical assistance to support the continuation of in-person services for existing and new patients
- Enhancing MAT access through federally licensed opioid treatment programs: Ohio has expanded take-home dosing policies, so that many patients do not have to worry about coming to the clinic daily and risking exposure to COVID-19
- Supporting congregate care providers (Adult Care Facilities and Recovery Housing) in continued provision of safe spaces through connections to PPE and providing technical assistance

## Preventing Overdose Deaths
*Life-saving Measures*
OhioMHAS continues to fund and promote access to the life-saving drug, naloxone.
- Conducting outreach to jails to promote provision of naloxone upon release for those with SUD
- Educating first responders on COVID-19 risks related to administration of the drug to unresponsive patients
- Expanding community access points where the public can obtain naloxone, including the provision of naloxone at local pharmacies, fire stations, and syringe exchange locations
- Created a mail-order naloxone program

*Support for Criminal Justice Involved Individuals*
- Improving community linkage resources for people with SUD transitioning from prison back to the community
- Encouraging jails, through funding opportunities, to offer all three forms of medication-assisted treatment to inmates with SUD

*Education and Intervention*
- Expanding the number of prescribers who are administering SBIRT screenings to high-risk patients
- Creating a prescribing curriculum for Ohio's Medical Colleges
- Creating a course for faith communities about the opioid epidemic and treatment options
- Investing in campaigns targeting the general public, those struggling with addiction, and their loved ones for stigma reduction, education, and promotion resources on where to get help

## Responding to Mental Health Needs and Suicide Prevention

*Operationalize Data*
- Operationalize available suicide and suicide attempt data to help drive state and local strategies

*Education and Intervention*
- Promoting healthy messages aimed at improving resilience and increasing safe and healthy habits through campaigns and community networks
- Raising awareness through new campaigns and existing communication channels (e.g. social media) on when, where, and how to access behavioral health services.
- Expanding school-based behavioral health prevention services in collaboration with school districts and community behavioral health systems, including the use of telehealth for prevention activities
- Funding expansion of Mental Health First Aid for the general public and Critical Incident Training (CIT) for police officers
- Providing learning opportunities to organizations on the core components of Zero Suicide and on how to implement service protocols for individuals at differing levels of suicide risk
- Expanding access to quality crisis services in communities across the state through ongoing training and investment in crisis care infrastructure
- Providing funding to address one-time individual crisis risk issues needed to avoid hospitalization or emergency crisis care
- Supporting drug-free and suicide prevention coalitions throughout the state to improve their effectiveness and focus more closely on minority communities
- Funding stigma reduction grants to community and faith-based organizations in targeted high-risk communities

*Increase Access to Treatment*
- Updating rules and regulations to ensure behavioral health providers can continue to offer treatment services during the pandemic via telehealth
- Providing technical assistance to behavioral health providers on clinical and operational best practices in telehealth
- Assisting behavioral health providers with purchasing of PPE needed for critical in-person services
- Continue to train, certify, and support Peer Recovery Supporters in virtual environments to provide critical community treatment services
- Making treatment more visible and accessible through media campaigns and call center referrals