

DMHAS UPDATE



FALL 2024

A Message from the Commissioner

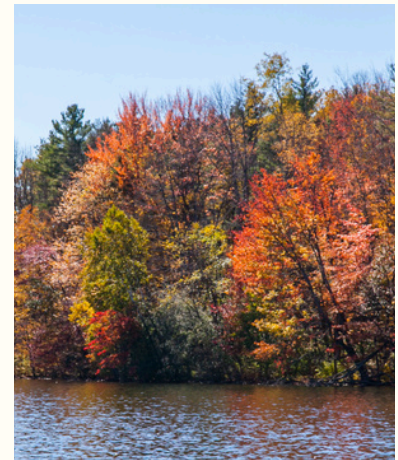
As we close out November and continue through this season of reflection and gratitude, I'm pleased to share this fall update from DMHAS. This time of year reminds us to look back on the work we've accomplished and to prepare for the opportunities ahead as we support behavioral health and recovery across Connecticut.

In September, we observed both Suicide Prevention Month and Recovery Month, taking the opportunity to strengthen our commitment to supporting those in crisis and those on their recovery journeys. Through focused awareness campaigns, prevention initiatives, and comprehensive crisis and recovery support services, we reinforced our commitment to supporting the health of our communities.

October was also a significant month, highlighting Substance Use Prevention Month and strengthening our dedication to education and outreach in preventing substance use. During National Mental Illness Awareness Week, we took time to highlight the importance of accessible mental health care for all. We also celebrated World Mental Health Day on October 10th, reflecting on our commitment to wellness and support for individuals statewide.

As we move through November, with the holidays just around the corner, we are reminded of the importance of compassion, connection, and our shared commitment to service and care for one another. Thank you for your continued dedication, hard work, and commitment to our mission. I look forward to all we'll achieve together in the months ahead. Wishing you a warm and productive season, and a Happy Thanksgiving.

- Nancy



DMHAS by the Numbers

43

New hires in
September and
October

98,820

Clients served
in FY24



Recovery Month



Celebrating Recovery Month with the “Recovery is Possible” Event

September marked Recovery Month, and DMHAS joined forces with Pathfinders Inc. for the “Recovery is Possible” Recovery Event, a day dedicated to celebrating individuals in recovery and their families. With over 200 attendees, the event was a vibrant gathering featuring fun activities, delicious food, and uplifting music. Attendees also benefited from training sessions and a dynamic speaker panel that brought together diverse voices in recovery.

“Recovery Happens Here CT” Media Campaign Launches!

The Office of Recovery Community Affairs kicked off the “Recovery Happens Here CT” media campaign at the start of Recovery Month, aiming to break stigma and highlight personal recovery journeys. Through videos, artwork, poetry, and short stories, people across Connecticut are sharing their experiences. Visit recoveryhappensherect.org and follow daily updates on Facebook and Instagram. This year-long project welcomes everyone’s contributions!

Celebrating Recovery and Community at the CCAR Recovery Walk

On September 28th, the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) hosted its annual Recovery Walk, an event dedicated to celebrating the resilience and strength of individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. This year’s event saw an outpouring of support from people across the state, including community members, advocates, and family members.

Commissioner Navarretta and former Commissioner Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon joined the event, expressing gratitude for CCAR’s 24 years of leadership in recovery advocacy and free support services.



Suicide Prevention Month

During Suicide Prevention Month this September, DMHAS and its partners reaffirmed their commitment to advancing behavioral health support and suicide prevention initiatives throughout Connecticut. In collaboration with the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board, DMHAS helped launch the development of the 2030 State Plan for Suicide Prevention, a strategy uniting healthcare providers, educators, community leaders, and those with lived experience to build a future where every resident feels valued and connected.



DMHAS Engages in Statewide Mental Health Discussions

DMHAS joined the Comptroller’s Roundtable on Mental Health and the Governor’s Roundtable on Suicide, engaging in important discussions about advancing behavioral health support across the state. These gatherings reinforced our commitment to fostering a responsive and stigma-free behavioral health system. These events highlighted essential resources like the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which provides 24/7 support to those who need it.



Stories Behind the Statistics: DMHAS, DCF, and Women’s Consortium Host Suicide Awareness Screening

On September 19th, DMHAS, DCF, and the Connecticut Women’s Consortium hosted a screening of *Moving America’s Soul on Suicide*, a documentary spotlighting the human stories behind suicide statistics. Commissioner Navarretta opened the event, underscoring how these personal narratives resonate with DMHAS’s mission of providing compassionate behavioral health care.



**Empowering Narratives:
PRCH's "Meet The Authors" Showcases Peer Support**

On September 25th, the Upward Spiral Peer Support Summer Series hosted a memorable "Meet The Authors" event, bringing together inspiring voices from Connecticut and beyond. Organized by the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health, with support from the Yale Lived Experience Transformation Leadership Academy, this gathering highlighted the power of lived experience and peer support. DMHAS Commissioner Navarretta delivered opening remarks, underscoring the value of storytelling in fostering resilience, recovery, and hope. Authors shared their personal journeys, encouraging the audience to think differently about behavioral health and substance use. This event reinforced the essential role that personal narratives and peer support play in transforming care and fostering inclusive communities.



Women's Services Joins Purple Flag Raising for Domestic Violence Awareness

Women's Services staff joined Lt. Governor Bysiewicz, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and other community partners at the Capitol on October 8th to raise the purple flag in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Safe Connect, Connecticut's Domestic Violence Resource Line (ctsafecconnect.org), is a valuable resource, providing support and connecting survivors and professionals to the services they need to assist those affected by abuse and intimate partner violence.

Older Adult Services Engages Communities at Local Health Fairs

DMHAS Older Adult Services participated in the Bristol Health Fair on October 5th and the Bethany Senior Fair on October 16th, connecting with older adults in the community. They provided tailored resources and information on mental health, wellness, and accessible care, reinforcing DMHAS's commitment to supporting the well-being of Connecticut's aging population.



2024 Prevention Summit

This October, DMHAS hosted the first Connecticut Prevention Summit, gathering behavioral health professionals, prevention advocates, and community leaders at The Delamar Hotel in West Hartford. This groundbreaking event emphasized the state's commitment to proactive approaches in substance use prevention and mental wellness.

Commissioner Navarretta opened the summit with a message of gratitude and optimism, highlighting the essential role of prevention in DMHAS's mission. She reflected on her experiences in behavioral health, noting how early intervention can transform lives and strengthen communities.

Keynotes from Dr. Kristen Gilliland and Cedric Hall provided attendees with valuable insights into topics like neuroscience and youth engagement. The day continued with interactive workshops on critical issues, such as substance use prevention for youth and promoting mental wellness, allowing participants to exchange ideas and learn from one another.

The success of this first Prevention Summit highlights the dedication and collaboration within Connecticut's prevention community. By building on the insights and connections gained during the event, DMHAS and its partners are well-positioned to make significant strides in advancing prevention efforts across the state.



Celebrating Five Decades of Care at CRMHC

On Wednesday, October 2nd, the Capitol Region Mental Health Center (CRMHC) celebrated its 50th anniversary with a lively potluck luncheon



attended by current staff, returning retirees, friends, and community partners. For five decades, CRMHC has been a cornerstone of compassionate, whole-person care in Hartford, offering essential mental health and substance use services to approximately 2,000 people each year. Congratulations, CRMHC, on 50 years of dedicated service!



SMHA's Breast Cancer Awareness Day Brings Education and Community Spirit

On October 9, 2024, SMHA observed Breast Cancer Awareness Day with a special event for clients and staff. The Behavioral Health Home (BHH) Team led activities that included crafts, refreshments, and engaging education sessions by Cynthia L'Heureux, APRN. The day highlighted a shared commitment to breast cancer awareness, with clients and staff dressing in their best pink attire to support the cause

SMHA Hosts Second Annual Integrated Care Open House

On October 16, 2024, the Southeastern Mental Health Authority hosted its second annual Integrated Care Open House. This successful event brought together DMHAS clients and providers to explore a range of services supporting whole-person care, including primary care, mental health services, addiction support, and community resources.



Supporting Young Adults: RM 4 Open House at Bridges Healthcare

Commissioner Navarretta and and Elsa Ward, DMHAS Director of Recovery and Community Affairs, joined Young Adult Services in the celebration of an Open House at RM 4, the Bridges Healthcare Young Adult Drop-in Center on October 23rd, sponsored by Youth Recovery Connecticut and SMART Recovery. This exciting event highlighted Bridges programs for young adults in a nurturing environment, including social and life skills workshops, meditation sessions, SMART Recovery Meetings, individual case management, and more.



Human Trafficking Training Highlights DMHAS Commitment to Trauma-Informed Care

OOC YAS and Evidence Based Practices staff partnered together to facilitate a Human Trafficking Training at the Connecticut Women's Consortium Trauma and Recovery Conference on October 17th and 18th. Human Trafficking trainings were also facilitated this fall at BH Care and United Services, with an upcoming training at the CVH Grand Rounds in November.

YAS Supports Families at New Britain Housing Resource Fair

YAS participated in the Housing Resource Fair on October 26th, hosted by the Department of Children and Families Region 6 Regional Advisory Council in partnership with the Central Network of Care. Held at the New Britain Housing Authority, this event showcased a variety of programs, resources, and information to assist families in learning more about housing options and related community support services.

Celebrating Our Retirees

This November, we bid farewell to several dedicated members of the DMHAS team as they embark on their well-deserved retirements. Their commitment and service have left a lasting impact on our agency and the individuals we serve. Please join us in congratulating and thanking the following retirees:

- Annie Augustine – Forensic Head Nurse, Whiting Forensic Hospital
- Candace Buchanan – Supervising Clinician, Connecticut Mental Health Center
- Kimberly Clark – Forensic Nurse, Whiting Forensic Hospital
- Maria Dougherty – PSRB Competency Monitor, Whiting Forensic Hospital
- Jane St. Laurent – Supervising Clinician, Office of the Commissioner
- Gregg Tilley – Supervising Nurse, Connecticut Valley Hospital
- Debra Vince – Certified OT Assistant, Whiting Forensic Hospital

We are grateful for their contributions and wish them all the best in their next chapter!



Supporting Staff, Tackling Shortages: DMHAS Loan Programs

DMHAS is tackling health care shortages and supporting its staff through loan forgiveness programs. The State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) has awarded up to \$50,000 each to 36 employees, totaling over \$1.4 million, with \$400,000 pending for six more. In exchange, recipients commit to two years of service at DMHAS or in health professional shortage areas. Through a partnership with the Department of Public Health, all DMHAS facilities now qualify, making the agency a leader in SLRP awards. Additionally, 30 employees received loan forgiveness through the National Health Care Service Corps (NHSC).

Compliance Corner - Electronic Communications at DMHAS

Did you know DMHAS has recently updated our policy and form for Electronic Communications?

Technology enhances both our personal and professional lives, and one key benefit is the ability to support electronic communications with patients upon request. With this in mind, updating our electronic communications policy became a top priority. Our new form now includes a dedicated section for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHoH) community, allowing for FaceTime communication.

Please take a moment to review the new form (in English or Spanish), including the section for our DHoH community at the bottom. As a reminder, ask your patients to complete this form at intake and renew it annually.



Celebrating Excellence: CVH Mental Health Assistants of the Year Awards

Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) recently hosted its 2024 Mental Health Assistants (MHAs) of the Year Awards, recognizing the dedication and hard work of its exceptional staff. The ceremony celebrated the contributions of all the nominees, who play a vital role in supporting patients and fostering recovery. Congratulations to all the nominees for their outstanding achievements and commitment to mental health care.

Honoring Wini Olson: 40 Years of Mental Health Advocacy and Service

River Valley Services proudly recognized Wini Olson for her extraordinary dedication to mental health advocacy over the past 40 years. Wini's unwavering commitment has profoundly impacted countless individuals in need. Her 15 years of service on the River Valley Services Advisory Board are a testament to her enduring passion for supporting others.



Celebrating Achievement: SWCMHS Hosts Employment & Education Awards

SWCMHS proudly hosted the Employment & Education Awards. Awards were given to individuals who achieved employment, academic milestones, and other significant life accomplishments. Leadership from the Commissioner's Office - including Celeste Cremin-Endes, Ellen Econs, and Harry Gerowe - joined SWCMHS CEO Fran Giannini and others for a memorable luncheon celebration.

Special thanks to Alinette Monterio, Chris Gerbasi from SWCMHS, and the dedicated staff from Ability Beyond, Goodwill North-West, Kennedy Collective, and Laurel House for making this event such a success!



Connecticut Secures \$7M to Combat Opioid Crisis

Connecticut recently secured a \$7 million federal grant from the Department of Justice to combat the opioid crisis, with funds directed toward substance use service providers in Western Connecticut. Announced during a press conference attended by Senators Murphy and Blumenthal, Representative Larson, and DMHAS Deputy Commissioner Colleen Harrington, this grant will support critical initiatives such as post-incarceration support, collaboration among first responders and hospitals, distribution of Naloxone and drug test strips, and resources for children impacted by substance use.



Skill-Building and Success at the YASBIZ Work & Learn Marketplace

The November YASBIZ Work & Learn Marketplace was a resounding success, featuring over 20 vendors, four presenters, eight secret shoppers, and 65 attendees. The event saw one of the highest vendor product sellouts to date and provided participants with opportunities to build essential workplace skills like public speaking. Highlights included inspiring visits from Deputy Commissioner Colleen Harrington, who connected with young adult vendors and championed their growth, and CTDMHAS Director of Recovery Community Affairs Elsa Ward, who shared uplifting wisdom and encouragement. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this vibrant and empowering event!

