

DMHAS Update

Summer 2024 - Volume 1



Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta

As summer ends and we look forward to the new season, I'm excited to share our refreshed newsletter. Our goal is to better serve you by providing relevant information that supports our vital work. This newsletter will highlight incredible efforts across DMHAS and keep you informed and engaged. This season's newsletter will be released in two volumes.

The end of summer is significant, as it includes three crucial awareness campaigns. On August 31st, we observed International Overdose Awareness Day, a solemn reminder of lives lost and a call to action for prevention, treatment, and support. It's a time to remember those we've lost, support recovery, and educate communities on addressing substance use disorders with compassion.

In September, we focus on Suicide Prevention Month and Recovery Month. At DMHAS, we're committed to raising awareness, breaking down stigmas, and ensuring everyone knows that help is available and hope is real. Prevention and recovery initiatives across Connecticut save lives by providing access to care, fostering supportive environments, and advocating for mental health.

As we navigate this transitional season, I encourage you to engage in these awareness efforts, both professionally and personally. Together, we can create a community where everyone feels supported, valued, and heard – a community where help and hope are always within reach. Let's carry these commitments forward as we work toward a healthier, more compassionate future for all.

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

A "Thank You" to DMHAS Staff

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Department Updates



CONNECTICUT
Mental Health & Addiction Services

A “Thank You” to the Staff of DMHAS

August brought its share of challenges, from severe flooding to the swift response required during the CrowdStrike incident. Through it all, our staff showed remarkable dedication, often putting in extra hours to ensure that DMHAS remained on course. Notably, our facilities team went above and beyond to keep the

Middletown campus powered during an unexpected outage, ensuring continuity of our critical services. Their efforts have been vital in navigating these tough situations, and their commitment is truly appreciated. Our staff stepped up when it mattered most, exemplifying the resilience and teamwork that define our Department.



After the flood that affected so many Connecticut residents, the Red Cross reached out to DMHAS to assist in providing resources and support. David Denino, Regional Mental Health Lead for the Red Cross stated DMHAS’ response was immediate and accommodating. Michael Giralmo collaborated with WCMHN to provide residents in Western Connecticut the assistance they desperately needed. On Saturday July 24th Jocelyn Tapia and Marissa Burke, clinicians from WCMHN Waterbury site joined Red Cross volunteers in Newtown. On Sunday Kathryn Defiore and Tina Severy, clinicians from WCMHN Waterbury joined Red Cross volunteers in Southbury. A special thank you to Jocelyn, Marissa, Kathryn and Tina who quickly volunteered to support their community.

Connecticut's First Peer Respite Home: The Gloria House Opens Its Doors

DMHAS recently celebrated the opening of the state's first peer respite program at The Gloria House in New Britain. This innovative facility marked a significant advancement in providing community-based, non-clinical crisis support for individuals with behavioral health needs.

Peer respite programs, like The Gloria House, are designed to offer short-term, voluntary, and overnight refuge for those going through difficult times. The focus of the program is on maintaining community connection within a homelike environment, where support is provided by staff with lived experience.

These employees, having received specialized training, are able to use their personal insights to assist others on their healing journeys. The Gloria House is one of only twenty-two such programs in the United States and was facilitated by New Life II under contract with DMHAS.

When The Gloria House opened its doors on July 1st, it began serving individuals from across Connecticut, offering services around the clock, every day of the year. The facility has the capacity to accommodate four individuals at a time, ensuring that each guest received personalized attention and care. The program emphasizes mutual agreement between staff and guests regarding the suitability of services, ensuring that The Gloria House provides the right support for those who needed it most.

This milestone represented the beginning of a new chapter in Connecticut's approach to mental health and crisis support, with The Gloria House setting a precedent for compassionate, community-driven care. The success of this program underscored the state's commitment to innovative solutions that prioritize the well-being and recovery of its residents.



From left: HHS Exec. Officer Taylor Bryan-Turner; DMHAS Section Chief Julienne Giard; DMHAS Commissioner Navarretta; HHS Regional Director Everett Handford; New Life II Executive Director Pastor Dana Smith; New Life II Director Pastor Evelyn Smith; DMHAS Director of Recovery Community Affairs Elsa Ward; SAMHSA Regional Director Scott M. Gagnon

Empowering Our LPNs: A New Educational Pathway Launched

In partnership with Charter Oak College, DMHAS has introduced a new initiative specifically designed to



support our Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in their pursuit of advancing their nursing careers.

The program offers 20 of our dedicated LPNs the opportunity to complete the prerequisite courses needed to pursue a nursing degree at no cost to them. This initiative is a reflection of DMHAS's ongoing commitment to investing in the growth and development of our healthcare professionals, ensuring they have the resources and support necessary to reach their full potential.

The response to this program was nothing short of extraordinary. Within just 5 minutes of opening enrollment, all available spots were filled. This rapid enrollment underscores the passion and commitment of our LPNs to continue their education and expand their skills in order to provide the highest level of care to those we serve.

This is just the beginning of an exciting journey, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact this program will have on our agency and the communities we serve. Stay tuned for more updates as our LPNs progress through the program and take the next steps in their careers.

Overdose Awareness Day

On August 31, we observed Overdose Awareness Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness about the devastating impact of overdoses and reducing the stigma associated with drug-related deaths. This day serves as a reminder of the lives lost to overdose and the importance of prevention, education, and support for those at risk.

DMHAS took an active role in this year's observance by participating in a press conference alongside community leaders, health professionals, and advocates. The event emphasized the importance of education, early intervention, and accessible treatment options in combating the overdose epidemic. As we continue our efforts, let this day serve as a reminder that through collective action



DMHAS Opioid Services Coordinator Justin Mehl demonstrates how to properly administer naltrexone

and compassion, we can make a significant impact in saving lives and supporting those affected by overdose.



Our LiveLOUD campaign has been incredibly successful in raising awareness and providing resources for those affected by opioid use. With millions of social media impressions, the campaign has effectively reached a broad audience, helping to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help and support.

Enhancing Early Psychosis Care: The Impact of the STEP Learning Collaborative in Connecticut

The STEP Learning Collaborative, a public-academic collaboration between DMHAS, DCF and Yale's STEP Program, has partnered with the 13 LMHAs across the state to deliver safe, timely, and effective pathways to and through care for every young person experiencing first episode psychosis in Connecticut. Since launching the centralized referral number, (203) 200-0140, in February, the Early Detection and Assessment Coordinators (EDACs) have screened over 170 callers, 29 of which were eligible, with 22 individuals experiencing first-episode psychosis successfully being admitted into outpatient care.

Early Detection:

Mindmap, an early detection campaign that aims to minimize delays to care, is being deployed within the statewide STEP Learning Collaborative to improve pathways to care at the collaborating agencies. The early detection campaign runs statewide, and has been featured on buses, billboards, news, radio, and town fairs. Outreach and detailing efforts are in full swing, with the STEP LC team partnering with LMHAs to connect with various clinical and non-clinical stakeholders across the state about this new system of care of early psychosis.

Workforce Development:

The STEP Learning Collaborative hosts a monthly training series and provider consultation line to support workforce development and care quality. Education is also available for non-clinical stakeholders through the family and community focused workshops and virtual resources. This year, the STEP LC has hosted 12 live trainings, reaching 645 stakeholders.



Suicide Prevention Month

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, a significant time as we observe the first 988 Day on September 8th, highlighting the 988 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. It also marks the 20th anniversary of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (GLS Act), introduced in 2004 by Senator Gordon Smith after the tragic loss of his son to suicide, and co-sponsored by Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut. The GLS Act has been instrumental in advancing youth suicide prevention efforts, supporting state and tribal youth suicide early intervention strategies, and funding the development of the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center.

Connecticut's suicide prevention infrastructure has been greatly supported by four GLS state grants received by DMHAS and directed by the Prevention and Health Promotion Division (2006-10, 2011-14, 2015-2020, 2023-2028). September is a time to educate others on recognizing and responding to individuals struggling with suicidal thoughts, promote effective prevention strategies, and support those affected by suicide. The Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board and Regional Suicide Advisory Boards will kick off the revision of the state suicide prevention plan for 2030 at a meeting on September 12th, reflecting on past successes and challenges while planning for a lifesaving future. The Connecticut statewide suicide prevention campaign, "1 WORD, 1 VOICE, 1 LIFE...Be the 1 to start the conversation," is recognized nationwide, with free resources available to everyone.

On Thursday, August 29th, DMHAS participated in a roundtable event to discuss a community approach to suicide prevention at the Village in Hartford with Governor Lamont, DCF, DPH, CSDE, OCA, the Governor's Children's Cabinet, United Way, Wheeler, legislators, and advocates.



Compliance Corner

HHS Office for Civil Rights Celebrates the 28th Anniversary of Health Information Privacy and Security Law

On August 21st, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) celebrated the 28th anniversary of the signing of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (better known as “HIPAA”). Twenty-eight years ago, President Bill Clinton signed this historic bipartisan legislation into law. HIPAA ushered in many needed health care reforms.

Today, HIPAA is best associated with requiring, for the first time, a set of standards for safeguarding the privacy and security of individually identifiable health information; it is administered and enforced by OCR.



Did you know?

Did you know that another way DMHAS must maintain compliance is by monitoring and maintaining the SFI (Statement of Financial Interests) every year? Liz Taylor, as the Chief Compliance Officer, is also appointed as the Ethics Liaison for DMHAS.

What is SFI? The Annual Statement of Financial Interests (SFI) is a public disclosure filing required pursuant to the Code of Ethics for Public Officials (Chapter 10, Part I, Connecticut General Statutes), specifically Section 1-83.

By statute, all state-wide elected officers, members of the General Assembly, department heads and their deputies, members of the Gaming Policy Board, the executive director of the Division of Special Revenue within the Department of Revenue Services, members of directors of each quasi-public agency, members of the Investment Advisory Council, state marshals and such members of the executive department and such employees of quasi-public agencies are required to file a SFI every year.

During the course of the year, the Ethics Liaison and Chief Compliance Officer monitors and maintains compliance for DMHAS. DMHAS attained 100% compliance for 2023!

Prevention Division

National Prevention Week

National Prevention Week 2024, held on May 12th – 18th, is a national public education platform bringing together communities and organizations to raise awareness about the importance of substance use prevention and positive mental health. For over ten years, Connecticut has held local, regional, and statewide events to showcase the power and importance of prevention across our state. On May 18th, the statewide event was held at the CT Science Center featuring resource tables from

prevention partners among the exhibits throughout the Center. Over 600 people attended and received important resources for themselves or a friend.



National Prevention Network Conference

From August 12-16, 2024, three members of the DMHAS PHP team traveled to Phoenix, AZ for the National Prevention Network Annual Conference. Stephanie Welch, Kelley Edwards and Jacquelyn Camposano were among 900 attendees from across the world learning from SAMHSA leaders, state prevention managers and prevention peers throughout the week. Jacquelyn, a Tobacco Enforcement Special Investigator, and Kelley, a Behavioral Health Program Manager,



presented a workshop to approximately 80 law enforcement and prevention professionals entitled, “CT DMHAS Tobacco Prevention and Enforcement Program”, which spotlighted CT’s efforts to reduce youth access to tobacco and nicotine products.