



Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals

Division Message Regarding COVID-19

Dear DD Community,

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn, have brought a set of challenges to the country and the state that have never been seen before.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) is working with our sister state agencies on responsive strategies to many of the issues that are impacting both Rhode Islanders with disabilities and the network of licensed Developmental Disability Organizations (DDOs). This update is to provide you with information about the collaborative work over the past two weeks as well as an update to planning underway.

The Department has been working on adapting to the State of Emergency requirements. Some of the completed strategies are below:

-- Advancing alternatives and options to minimize face-to-face meetings and close contact:

- Developed a simplified extension for Individualized Service Plans (ISP) with a one-page fillable interim plan form which can be found on the BHDDH website.
- Received approval for telehealth/ telephonic mode of delivery for providers to remotely continue to support individuals living with families, or living independently, for some essential services.

--Assisting provider agencies in their response to COVID:

- Approval of the request to provide for retainer payments for applicable DD providers for workforce retention. An implementation plan is being developed and we will be sending out a communication with specific instructions. The first payment may be made as early as next week.
- Accommodated program variances, such as a change to the current regulations to promote responsive hiring practices that will expedite on-boarding of new staff.
- Work with the provider agencies and through established State vendors to secure interpreter services. Due to the state of emergency and workforce impacts, however, if these resources cannot be secured in a timely manner and if alternate communication protocols are insufficient, we will work with RI Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) for additional access/assistance.

-- The Department has a supporting daily presence at the RI Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) for representation of the DD community in emergency preparedness plans:

- Escalated the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) projected needs for provider agencies to RIEMA

-- Additional preparation activities underway:

- Requested that Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are identified as essential healthcare workers; this would prioritize them for testing and for other needed public health priorities. Management for overtime for self-directed staff through Fiscal Intermediaries (FIs) as well as seeking authority for the inclusion of payment for parents in situations where alternative care providers are unavailable.
- Readying vacant residential sites for potential use for specialized needs and/or for quarantine purposes, if medically advised.
- Finalizing resources/guidance for "Residential/Congregate Care" to address consumer and staff needs relative to COVID-19 illness or concerns of illness.
- Engagement with all individuals and their families to assess their caregiver status and to support access to community resources impacted by COVID.

-- Finally, to streamline communication with the BHDDH, the following changes have occurred:

- Kevin Savage is assuming primary contact with the DDOs around programmatic needs to include licensing, policy/regulations, and state of emergency resources. He is directly coordinating these areas with RIEMA/RIDOH/BHDDH clinical and administrative leadership.
- Kerri Zanchi has agreed to remain with the Department for a little while longer to support the DDD systemic response during this state of emergency. Her work is focused around the administrative and/or programmatic coordination between the funding/operational structure. This is being done in direct coordination with BHDDH leadership (Director, CFO, Legal, Data Unit) and OHHS to inform/facilitate funding options, pathways and related operational processes.
- Heather Mincey is assuming lead for the Social Case Workers operations and support; consumer funding/resource needs and related provider technical support. Heather is also working with Joni Martell on readying vacant sites and with troubleshooting on the day to day individual consumer/provider level. She is also taking point for self-direction and related fiscal intermediary areas.
- Marlanea Peabody is working on Medicaid waivers when necessary and brings together our Medicaid partners to get authority for emergency funding.

DDD is planning to have weekly updates for the DD community; we are also exploring ways to expand communications.



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