



**Highlights of the 8/17 Public Forum**

A virtual DD public forum was held on Monday, August 17 via Zoom with more than 140 participants. BHDDH greatly appreciates the productive participation from consumers, families, providers, advocates and other stakeholders. The forum was helpful in assisting the Department in continuing to improve practices and to address issues to benefit consumers.

**How does DDD get information about policy changes out to the people served and their families?**

DDD provides information through these bulletins as well as through quarterly newsletters mailed to all participants with their quarterly authorization statements. Providers, including Fiscal Intermediaries (FI), are also sent information to share with those they serve. Family members who do not live with participants and other stakeholders who want to stay informed are encouraged to sign up for the emailed DDD newsletters as they will not receive mailings that go to the participants and legal guardians.

Information is also posted on the BHDDH website and often shared and posted by community partners such as the RI Parent Information Network, the Sherlock Center, and Advocates in Action. Advocates in Action has accessibility tools on their website to read content aloud and translate content in many different languages.

We recommend that independent plan writers sign up for all BHDDH newsletters to ensure they remain up-to-date on all information and guidance from the State.

With DDD's new case management system, social caseworkers are now able to document how participants would prefer to receive information, whether email, a mailed hard copy, phone call, or other method, and what language communication should be in. As this information is collected, we will be looking at the best ways to get information out to those we serve.

**Are you providing PPE for individuals who self-direct services? If so, how can it be obtained?**

Fiscal Intermediaries (FIs) will be gathering information from self-directed individuals on identifying what PPE cannot be procured independent of the state and what PPE is needed. We are working out the logistics for distribution. Please look for information from your FI or contact your social caseworker to let them know your needs.

**When will the essential worker designation be operationalized so testing for this group can be prioritized?**

Staff who work for DDOs can get testing even if asymptomatic, but it the time it takes to get results can vary depending on the lab and type of test. See the RIDOH FAQs about testing: <https://health.ri.gov/publications/frequentlyaskedquestions/RI-COVID-19-Testing.pdf>

**There has been an advocacy group that meets with the Division regularly since COVID began. What is the contact information to reach that group?**

Kevin Nerney at the Developmental Disabilities Council is a contact for the advocacy group. He can be reached at [kevinnerney@riddc.org](mailto:kevinnerney@riddc.org). Other agencies that are part of the group include the RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN), RI Families Organized for Reform Change and Empowerment (RI FORCE), PLAN RI, and Advocates in Action RI. There are also participants and family members on the call.

**When will day programs be able to open?**

Many caregivers who need to return to work are worried about what their loved ones will do. Our primary concern is that providers are able to open safely in accordance with RIDOH guidelines for social distancing and group size with appropriate staffing levels. We anticipate that day supports will look different as providers rely less on congregate facility-based programs. Guidelines for providers and considerations for individuals and families are expected to be released next week.

**Self-Directed Services**

**I currently get services from an agency. Who do I talk to if I want more information about self-directing my services?**

If you are interested in self-directing your services, you can talk with your social caseworker. The Sherlock Center has information about self-direction at <http://www.ric.edu/sherlockcenter/sds/sds.html>. You can also reach out to one of the Fiscal Intermediaries to ask questions.

Fiscal Intermediaries and Contacts

Fogarty	Nancy Lavena	nlavena@fogarty.com
Perspectives	Erin Marler	emarler@perspectivescorporation.com
Proability	Katie Sacco	Ksacco@proability.com
Seven Hills	Pat Linsquist	Plindquist@sevenhills.org
Trudeau	Cathy D’andrea	cdandrea@trudeaucenter.org

**Who can be hired as staff for self-directed people?**

People who self-direct can hire any qualified adult, including family members, parents, and legal guardians. SLA providers cannot be hired as self-directed staff.

In order to be hired by a self-directed person, the candidate must be able to pass a background check. Typically, a background check must be completed before hire. Due to COVID, a variance is in place for the requirement of a background check. The variance requires the background checks to be done within 60 days of the end of the State of Emergency. Fiscal Intermediaries have been given guidance on performing background assessments in lieu of background checks during the State of Emergency.

**Can SLA providers also be paid staff for the participant if they self-direct their day services?**

No. SLA providers cannot also be an employee of the participant. This changes the relationship and can jeopardize the SLA provider's stipend.

**Can people carry over unexpended funds from one quarter to the next or through the end of their Plan year?**

Yes. Authorizations for self-directed individuals are on an annual, not a quarterly basis, so funds can be moved between quarters.

**Can people make modifications in the last quarter of their Plan to reallocate any unspent funds to purchase other allowable items by DDD?**

Yes. There are no regulatory prohibitions against making plan or purchase order changes in the last quarter of a plan. Therefore, this is allowable.

## **Volunteers Needed for Workgroups to Simplify the DD System**

Five workgroups are being developed to address issues raised by the Court regarding complexity within the administrative requirements and procedures within the DD system. The recommendations stem from ongoing review of services under the Consent Decree. We are looking for individuals receiving services and family members to participate in their choice of one of five workgroups to add their expertise and input into the system reform. Meetings will start in September.

If you are interested, please contact Cindy Fusco at [Cynthia.Fusco@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:Cynthia.Fusco@bhddh.ri.gov).

1. **Eligibility Process Workgroup**: This workgroup will look at the process for determining the support needs of each individual and the need to consolidate the application for all pertinent RI services into one process.
2. **Appeals Process Workgroup**: This workgroup will look at the appeals process for individuals as it relates to eligibility, level of need, or funding level, including the L9/S109 process for requesting additional funding.
3. **Individual Budgets and Authority Workgroup**: This workgroup will look at the process and timeline for developing annual individual budgets responsive to individual needs; allowable costs; and flexibility.
4. **Fiscal Workgroup**: This workgroup will look at authorizations, rates, and billing units.
5. **Contracts Workgroup**: This workgroup will look at the timeline and process by which individuals contract with providers, billing procedures, and how to increase individual control over their services and how their budget is spent.

## COVID Testing

If you wake up tomorrow and have symptoms, you need to stay home, pick up the phone, and schedule a test. You could call your primary care provider or you could call a community health clinic or respiratory clinic (<http://health.ri.gov/covid/testing>). If you do not have symptoms, use <https://portal.ri.gov>. If you have questions, call the RIDOH COVID Hotline at 401-222-8022.

### I Need A COVID Test. Where Do I Go?



## Contact Tracing

There are three major rules of contact tracing:

1. Keep your contact tracing journal. Take one minute every day to write down the names of everyone you saw that day.
2. Make sure you write down the names and phone numbers of everyone you have over. If someone tests positive and says they were at your house, the contact tracers' first call will be to you, and they'll need to know the names and numbers of everyone who was there.
3. If you get called by the contact tracers, please answer the phone and provide your information. People may be hesitant to provide information over the phone, but be assured that the no personally identifiable information is stored in the Department of Health system, and all the information you provide is protected by the strictest privacy standards under HIPAA.

## Join a Study on Future Financial Planning for/with People with Disabilities



Planning for the future is a priority and concern for people with disabilities, and there are no commonly accepted standards of practice for services and processes that support people with disabilities and their families to plan and maintain their finances. Researchers at the University of Delaware would like to interview people

with disabilities, family members, and leaders of agencies that support people with disabilities via Zoom to build their knowledge about the issues and promising practices related to future financial planning people with disabilities.

Even if you have not had any experience with future financial planning, they would still like to speak with you! If you are interested in participating in [this study \[delaware.ca1.qualtrics.com\]](https://delaware.ca1.qualtrics.com), please click the link below to leave your contact information. Please also share this information with people you know who may be interested and with your networks!

[Link to Leave Contact Information \[delaware.ca1.qualtrics.com\]](https://delaware.ca1.qualtrics.com)

If you have any questions, please email Cory Gilden ([cgilden@udel.edu](mailto:cgilden@udel.edu)) or Caitlin Bailey, PhD ([cebailey@udel.edu](mailto:cebailey@udel.edu)), National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities, University of Delaware



## Peer-to-Peer and Family-to-Family Panel Members Needed

We are looking for a few great people to join a peer-to-peer panel or a family-to-family panel to share their stories. We are looking for individuals and family members who were initially apprehensive about working but who are now enjoying the benefits of employment.



BHDDH is collaborating with RIPIN to develop a series of virtual panels where you can share your experience of how you got past the myths, learned the facts, took the leap to employment, and what working means to you. We know others can learn and benefit from hearing from you!

If interested in joining either panel, please contact: **Tracey** at [Tracey.Cunningham@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:Tracey.Cunningham@bhddh.ri.gov) or (401) 462-3857 or **Jay** at [Gerard.MacKay@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:Gerard.MacKay@bhddh.ri.gov) or (401) 462-5279.

## Silver Linings

### **A million free masks distributed to RI communities through state initiative**

<https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/a-million-free-masks-distributed-to-ri-communities-through-state-initiative/>

by: Courtney Carter

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) — The Health Equity Zone Initiative, a division of the Rhode Island Department of Health, recently hit a very positive milestone: they’ve distributed more than a million free masks to Rhode Islanders.

Christopher Ausura, the initiative’s chief of special projects, said while many people may not be familiar with the group, they consider themselves a more “on the ground” division of the Health Department.

“Our approach has been and continues to be that equity is at the forefront of the response to COVID-19,” Ausura added. “We know that not all communities are being affected equally, and then if we are going to really get ahead of the pandemic, we need to understand that we have to get down to the community level.”

Ausura said this was done by establishing 10 zones in Rhode Island, which cover about 65% of the state:

Bristol Health Equity Zone	Pawtucket-Central Falls Health Equity Zone
Central Providence Health Equity Zone	Washington County Health Equity Zone
Cranston Health Equity Zone	West Elmwood 02907 Health Equity Zone
East Providence Health Equity Zone	West Warwick Health Equity Zone
Newport Health Equity Zone	Woonsocket Health Equity Zone

To distribute all of the masks, the initiative sent them to 108 different organizations, according to Ausura. “Those masks went to residents, faith-based communities, sports leagues, public housing, senior citizens, small businesses, health care providers, child care providers, you name it,” he said.

More than 425,000 of those masks went to One Neighborhood Builders, health equity project manager Allegra Scharff said.

“We asked for that from RIDOH, and they were able to give us that and more,” she said.

“We spent one day just sitting outside of our office and giving boxes to different organizations,” Scharff continued. “But while we were doing that, we saw that a lot of community members were coming up and asking for masks as well.”

Ausura said the initiative plans to continue giving out free masks.

## If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at [www.bhlink.org](http://www.bhlink.org) or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465)

If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

## Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

### Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;  
Email [RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov](mailto:RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov)  
Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

### Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)  
Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>  
*Includes a link to ASL videos*

### BHDDH Information on COVID-19's Impact on DD Services and the DD Community

Website [bhddh.ri.gov/COVID](http://bhddh.ri.gov/COVID)

### RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>  
Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email [callcenter@ripin.org](mailto:callcenter@ripin.org)

### Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>  
*Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you*

## Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates and newsletters from the Division, you can sign up on our website. From the main BHDDH page at [bhddh.ri.gov](http://bhddh.ri.gov), select **What's New**, then go to bottom and click on **DD Community Newsletter**. The link to sign up for the BHDDH Newsletter is directly below the title, as shown in the picture at right.



DD Community Newsletter  
SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER

## Contacting the Division

The department is working on a reduced workforce and therefore calls should not be placed directly to your social caseworker. DDD has put 24-hour phone coverage in place with a central business hour phone number and an on-call number for nights and weekends.

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers below. If you have any general questions or concerns, please email them if you can, in order to try to leave the phone lines free for those who need to call. We will do our best to address your questions directly or through future newsletters.

