



BHDDH Division of Developmental Disabilities

COVID-19 Update

March 27, 2020

The Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals (BHDDH) works to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have opportunities to live meaningful, purposeful lives in the least restrictive settings. 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 solutions to many of the issues that impact both Rhode Islanders with disabilities and the network of licensed Developmental Disability Organizations (DDOs). **This update is to let our stakeholders know some of the activities that have been happening in the last two weeks, and what is underway.**

The Department has been working on adapting to the State of Emergency requirements. Some of the completed and underway activities are below.

- Developing 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 that 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
 - Accommodated program variances, such as a change to the current regulations to promote responsive hiring practices that will expedite onboarding 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 DSPs are identified as essential healthcare workers; this would prioritize them for testing and for other needed public health priorities
 - Proposed allowing for overtime for self-directed staff through Fiscal Intermediaries (FIs) and the inclusion of payment for parents in situations where alternative care providers are unavailable.
 - Ready 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.
- DDD is planning to have weekly updates for the DD community, and is exploring ways to expand and improve communications.

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

- **Kevin Savage** will be the primary contact with the provider agencies around program needs including 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 graciously agreed to remain with the Department for a little while longer to support the DDD systemic response during this state of emergency. Her work will be focused on the administrative and programmatic coordination between the funding and operational structure. This is being done in direct coordination with BHDDH leadership and OHHS to inform and facilitate funding options, pathways and related operational processes.
- **Heather Mincey** is the lead for the social caseworker operations and support; consumer funding/resource needs and related provider technical support. Heather is also working with Joni Martell, the DD Residential Coordinator, on readying vacant sites and with troubleshooting the day-to-day individual consumer and provider issues. She is also the contact for self-direction and related fiscal intermediary areas.

Contacting the Division

The department is working on a reduced workforce and therefore calls should not be placed 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.

Please Call

During business hours (Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00), for questions or support

(401) 462-3421

At other hours, for emerging or imminent care related questions

(401) 265-7461

For medical or healthcare related emergencies

Your Primary Care Physician or 911

You may also send general questions to the AskDD email address. Please do not email critical issues.

BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers above.

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.