



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

**Behavioral Health Administration**

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October 8, 2021

Dear BH Partners:

As we enter into the fall season, I hope this communication finds you well. While you continue to care for the consumers that you serve and your teams, please also remember to stop and take some time to take care of yourselves. Look up every now and again and watch the leaves change to their vibrant fall colors and take a moment to inhale the scents of the season.

We are recognizing **National Hispanic Heritage Month**, which is celebrated from September 15 to October 15, as a time to recognize and honor the rich culture, history, and many contributions of Hispanic Americans. Hispanics or Latinos are the largest racial/ethnic minority population in the U.S. COVID-19 has unequally affected many racial and ethnic minority groups, putting them [more at risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19](#). It is vital that we take this opportunity during National Hispanic Heritage Month to bring greater awareness of behavioral health issues that challenge this community due to behavioral health inequities and stigma, and equally important to expand our outreach to encourage COVID-19 vaccinations throughout this community.

October is **National Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** month, October 3-9 is **National Mental Health Awareness Week**, and October 10 is **World Health Day**. October provides many opportunities for us to bring increased awareness to mental health issues and offer resources and support to help our communities maintain and regain wellness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a new lesson, among many, and that is that preventive care is self-care. In that vein, find a few moments to schedule your flu shot and encourage others to do so as well. [MDH recently issued guidance](#) for all COVID-19 vaccine providers. Most importantly, **individuals may self-attest to eligibility. Providers shall not turn away any individual who self-attests to eligibility for a booster or additional dose if immunocompromised.**

[We strongly encourage](#) all eligible Marylanders to get their booster shot.

On September 23, 2021, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended a booster shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for certain populations at least six months after the completion of their primary series.

The CDC recommends a booster dose for the following:

- Individuals 65 years and older
- Individuals 18 years and older who are residents in long-term care settings,

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- The Executive Order for Congregate and Residential Programs can be found at this link: [Executive Order for Congregate and Residential Programs.pdf \(optum.com\)](#)
- Individuals ages 18–64 years with [underlying medical conditions](#) and
- Individuals ages 18-64 years who are at an increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of occupational or institutional setting

Federal health officials have not yet offered guidance on booster doses for individuals who received a single-dose Janssen vaccine or two-dose Moderna vaccine. MDH is planning for booster vaccine administration for everyone eligible when those become available.

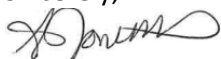
COVID continues to wear on each of us, of all ages, races, genders, and occupation. With the ongoing stress that we have and continue to experience with COVID and other stressors, nationally and locally we are seeing increases in anxiety, depression, and suicide attempts/suicidal ideation, when compared to pre-COVID days. Healthcare is an essential profession, and those who work in essential roles are among the most impacted by these stressors. During this month there will be several sites offering depression screenings and other health educational events to identify warning signs and encourage treatment. I hope you can support these efforts by sharing information and/or offering educational events to expand these outreach activities. If there are activities that focus on the healthcare workforce, I encourage you to participate for yourself, and your own mental and emotional health. Consider contacting your Local Behavioral Health Authority or Core Service Agency to learn of any activities in your area or how you can help.

This month, we are conducting a fourth Provider COVID-19 Survey to measure the ongoing impact of COVID-19, which will help us to continue to be responsive to community needs. A record-breaking 900+ of you responded to our last survey, let's break that record again! [Please complete this survey](#) and share with your networks. The results of the survey are expected by mid-December and will be posted on our website [Pages - bha-covid-19 \(maryland.gov\)](#).

Lastly, a webinar will be held entitled: Increasing Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Service Recipients Within the PBHS: Lessons from Montgomery County on Friday, October 15 from 1 – 2 p.m. Montgomery County has the highest vaccination uptake rate in Maryland for individuals 12 years of age and older served in the Public Behavioral Health System. Learn how to use communication, education, and technological interventions to close vaccination gaps in your community. Join by video at <https://meet.google.com/kuj-ztck-iam>, or dial: +1 470-285-0037 PIN: 224 851 045#. We also have archived webinars on vaccine hesitancy, which can be found on the [BHA website](#): 1. [Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy](#). 2. [Strategies for Providers to Increase Vaccine Uptake](#). 3. [Updates on the Vaccines and Vaccine Hesitancy](#).

I appreciate your commitment to helping individuals with behavioral health issues get the help they need, and in supporting their journey of recovery throughout the continuum of care. It is my honor and privilege to work and collaborate with you.

Sincerely,



Aliya Jones, M.D., MBA  
Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health