



***DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES***

DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

September 30, 2021

Dear Stakeholders, Colleagues and Partners:

It has been about six months since my last letter to you in which I shared an update on the happenings within the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS). At that time, we were coming out of the COVID-19 winter surge and looking forward to what springtime would bring. As you know a lot has happened since then.

The Division's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to consume a tremendous amount of our time and energy – as it likely has for all of you. In the past six plus months, we have worked together with our sister divisions within the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), our network of community providers and professional advocacy groups to coordinate vaccination clinics for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and for our service recipients and their families. DDDS took the lead to plan, organize, and facilitate 10 drive-thru vaccination clinics in March and April. In partnership with Rite Aid, The Columbus Organization, Kent/Sussex Industries, and Stockley Center, more than 2,300 DDDS service recipients and their caregivers were vaccinated using these drive-thru clinics. As vaccination rates went up and community spread retreated, the Division supported our service system in opening their doors to welcome back more individuals to their programs and communities of friends. We worked with residential providers to help reconnect service recipients with families and friends with expanded visitation access. These efforts resulted in day service programs across the state reopening their doors for limited in-person services and a resumption of in-home visiting for families, friends, and professional staff in provider-managed residential settings.

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic persists, DDDS continues to advance our efforts in the three areas I identified in my first letter in August of 2020: 1) optimize operations; 2) improve communications; and 3) expand opportunities. Below, you will find a summary of progress made in each of these areas over the last six months. However, before we get to that, I want to briefly touch on some exciting news for our service system. First, the Division received an additional \$17.2 million in this year's

budget to implement rate increases for services delivered by Direct Support Professionals. Because DDDS service recipients have enrolled in Medicaid Services, all but about a million of these dollars were eligible to be matched with federal funds. Thus, the overall rate increases we were able to implement exceed \$34 million. These rate increases are critical for strengthening and growing our workforce of Direct Support Professionals who are the backbone of our service system – in homes and programs all across the state. Supporting them ensures better supports for everyone we serve. Second, in April of 2021, The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was signed into law and offers a financial boost for states as they work to overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARPA provides states with a temporary 10-percentage-point increase to the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) for certain Medicaid eligible services. States can apply to CMS to use these funds to improve Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). The Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA) estimated that this temporary increase will equate to approximately \$52 million. DMMA hosted several listening sessions in July and August to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to share their ideas on how best to invest these funds. Although DMMA is still updating Delaware’s proposed plan, which is due to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) by mid-October, the areas consistently highlighted as most in need are the workforce, supports for family caregivers, housing supports, targeted expansion or enhancement of services, and information technology infrastructure. You can read more about these ongoing efforts by visiting the DMMA website at https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dmma/rescue_act.html.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented the Division with a unique opportunity to reflect on the health of our services and service system so that we may continue to grow and evolve in ways that allow us to plan for and meet the needs of our community in the future. This means ensuring there is a workforce in place to meet the needs of those we serve, that families can have access to the supports they need to care for a loved one, and that every individual we serve can access the services they need – human or technological – to live, work, and grow in their homes and in their communities.

I am honored to lead such a committed group of staff as those working for DDDS. Despite the ongoing challenge of navigating this once-in-a-lifetime public health emergency, we continue to find creative ways to ensure that the individuals we serve all across the State of Delaware have access to the supports they need to live their best lives. I am happy to offer this update so that we can continue to work together to build the future of services and service delivery for the individuals we support. As always, I welcome your ongoing engagement. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with questions, concerns, ideas, and interest at: DHSS_DDDS_Suggestions@delaware.gov.

Sincerely,

Marissa Catalon
Division Director

Updates:

1) Optimize Operations

- **Fully implement the new person-centered planning process using the Charting the LifeCourse framework and the LifeCourse tools.** Progress since February:
 - Planned with the technical assistance team from the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC) to develop a focused training series for DDDS Regional Leadership and DDDS Support Coordinators.
- **Fully implement and continuously improve the Targeted Case Management Services introduced in 2017.** Progress since February:
 - Conducted a series of facilitated provider information sessions for Columbus Community Navigators (CN) to maintain CN competency on available service options for people in need of employment and day services.
 - Performance Measurements established for Targeted Case Management Services have maintained excellent compliance scores, ranging from a low of 95% to a high of 98% for the state fiscal year 2021. As a Medicaid service, compliance is achieved at 86%. Columbus is performing well above the minimum compliance levels for the Targeted Case Management Services.
- **Seek creative solutions to recruit and retain DDDS staff for the “hard-to-fill” positions such as Nurses, Certified Nursing Assistants and Therapists.** Progress since February:
 - Engaged with approved state vendors of Temporary Medical Staffing to augment CNA and RN staff and ensure sufficient staffing levels.
 - Consulted with DHSS leadership and key staff from the Department of Human Resources on developing new recruitment and retention ideas for “hard-to-fill” facility nursing positions.
- **Maximize the use of Federal funds.** Progress since February:
 - Secured funding approval by CMS to help offset the cost of planning activities related to procuring an electronic Client Data Management System (CDMS).
 - Submitted an application to CMS to review the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the CDMS, approval of this document will enable DDDS to leverage additional federal funds to help pay for the cost of developing and implementing the CDMS.
 - Received \$209,000 in CARES Act Provider Relief Funds for facility upgrades at the Stockley Center to enhance aspects of patient safety and protection. \$39,000 of these funds were spent on an upgrade to the air handling system, \$137,000 on a new Nurse Call System, and the remaining \$33,000 will be spent on other COVID-related improvements at the Mary Ann Coverdale Center (Stockley Center).
 - Enrolled an additional 126 new service recipients into the Lifespan Waiver. In collaboration with the Columbus Organization, we have enrolled a total of 950 new service recipients into the Lifespan Waiver since 2018.
 - Filed 1 quarter of Medicaid administrative claims; these claims allow DDDS to receive funds from CMS (Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services) to share in

the cost of administering our Medicaid programs. The total for this claim is just under \$1M.

- Increased the hourly rate paid to Shared Living Providers by 45%: from \$9.80 to \$14.11. This targeted rate increase was made possible by our work over the last three years to maximize the use of federal funds; specifically, by enrolling service recipients into the Lifespan Waiver and by amending the division's Medicaid Cost Allocation Plan. More targeted rate increases are planned within this state fiscal year.
- Worked with DHSS Leadership and with our colleagues in DMMA to outline initial priorities and longer-term goals for increased federal dollars made available through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act.
- Partnered with DMMA on their listening tours to ensure ongoing access to best available knowledge from those we support on priorities for expanding and enhancing Home and Community-Based Services.
- **Implement new features in our electronic case record systems and transition to a fully integrated comprehensive case record.** Progress since February:
 - Added a Mobile App option to our contract with Therap. This feature makes service documentation by providers easier, especially for services delivered in the community.
 - Worked with Therap to automate the eligibility intake process.
 - Worked with Therap to design an interface with the Medicaid system to pull eligibility data into Therap, expected completion date 10/31/2021.
 - Initiated a pilot project with two provider agencies and Therap to test using the electronic Medication Administration Record (eMAR) in provider-managed residential settings. The eMAR will offer real-time access to medication administration information, which will allow for faster identification of medication errors and offer faster remediation, all enhancing the oversight and monitoring leading to enhanced health and safety of service recipients.

2) Improve Communications

- **Create a user-friendly website that guides individual users easily and efficiently to the information they need.** Progress since February:
 - Received positive stakeholder feedback on our streamlined application to determine DDDS eligibility.
 - Worked with our information technology partners to design a web-based application with secure transmission of protected health information, which we expect to finalize in the coming months.
 - Worked to enhance usability of the website with two additional features.
 - First, developing a series of visual data dashboards that will make it easier to access key data points for the Division's base operations and visually track progress on key projects and programs as they are implemented.
 - Second, working with an outside vendor to make accessing and understanding our services and supports more transparent and easier

to navigate with the goal of guiding users towards the service system (whether within DDDS or another Division) that best meets their needs.

- ***Develop sustainable and regular methods of communicating timely information to our internal staff and partners and external stakeholders.*** Progress since February:
 - Communications with Families:
 - Published six Letters to Families with COVID-19 updates via Columbus Community Navigators, DDDS Facebook page, and the DDDS website. Each letter was also read aloud by the DDDS Director of Community Services, Cory Nourie, and posted to the DDDS Facebook page.
 - Published weekly letters to families with a loved one who lives at Stockley Center.
 - Utilized the general DDDS Facebook page to share local information & events and national news stories.
 - Conducted a random survey of family caregivers to obtain feedback on a variety of topics such as: Employment, Rights, Service Planning, Choice, Health and Safety and COVID-19.
 - Communication with Providers:
 - Issued weekly provider guidance with COVID-19 updates and conducted weekly provider virtual meetings for COVID planning and updates.
 - Conducted monthly Provider Advisory Committees with Residential Habilitation Providers and Employment/Day Service Providers in addition to the two weekly virtual meetings.
 - Conducted quarterly Provider Best Practice meetings with the Nurse Consultation Providers and Behavioral Consultation Providers.
 - Formalized a standing quarterly meeting for provider training staff with the DDDS Office of Professional Development to improve information sharing and opportunities for provider input, feedback, and collaboration.
 - Launched a new web-based training series for service providers' mid-level managers: *"What I Need to Know About DDDS Services but Didn't Know to Ask"* which includes an explanation and a walk-through for some of our common procedures and policies.
 - Developed a plan to distribute Reportable Incident Data to each provider agency within our service system on a quarterly basis. The first report will be shared with the agency CEO/Executive Director beginning in October 2021.
 - Distributed a survey to internal staff and to our service providers to identify the topics we should include in our regular communications regarding the Client Data Management System (CDMS) project status.
 - Communications within and across DDDS:
 - Conducted two quarterly townhall meetings for DDDS employees.
 - Issued three Coronavirus Guidance documents for DDDS employees.

- Distributed formal policy updates to DDDS employees using the Delaware Learning Center (DLC), which alerts staff to review and acknowledge changes in updated policies.
- **Expand the reach of our digital engagement to provide additional opportunities for virtual learning, information sharing, and community.** Progress since February:
 - Collaborated with a group of caregiver advocates to launch the family-led Fireside and Poolside Chat virtual meetups for parents, caregivers and families to connect and learn about important topics. Topics included: respite, camp, before & aftercare, outdoor recreation, art, and inclusion.
- **Design and implement a public outreach and media campaign to increase the visibility of our service recipient population and the impact of our work.** Progress since February:
 - Collaborated with our partners at the DE Developmental Disabilities Council to engage in sustained outreach on developmental disabilities across the state. The priorities for public engagement include combatting stigma, supporting community integration, and helping to tell the stories of the individuals we support.

3) Expand Opportunities

- **Work with our partners at the Department of Education (DOE), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA), and the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) to strengthen how we work together to support youth with IDD as they transition from school services into adulthood.** Progress since February:
 - Organized a tour of the University of Delaware's Innovation Lab including staff from DDDS, DVR and Nemours to discuss supporting transitions with assistive technology.
 - Coordinated with LEAs and the Developmental Disabilities Council to recruit transition aged youth for the Junior Partners in Policy Making program.
 - Partnered with DOE to coordinate Employment and Day Service Provider presentations for School Transition Staff.
- **Examine best practice and explore innovative approaches to support people with unique or more complex support needs.** Progress since February:
 - Welcomed and oriented eight new provider agencies to our service network; offering services in Residential Habilitation, Nursing Consultation, Behavioral Consultation, Community Participation, Supported Living, Supported Employment and Day Habilitation.
 - Created and facilitated a work group to develop a model for an Enhanced Behavior Home waiver service to support our most complex service recipients
 - Collaborated with our Behavioral Consultation providers to create an opportunity for seven providers to participate on the Peer Review of Behavior Intervention Strategies (PROBIS) Committee as delegates. The PROBIS

Committee reviews and approves individual behavior support plans for over 800 service recipients.

- Contracted with Penn-Mar Human Services for consultation services. Penn-Mar will offer recommendations for improving community-based day and employment services.
- Recruited 16 new Shared Living providers (SLPs) to offer Residential Habilitation services. This increase represents an approximate 20% increase in the number of SLPs.
- Posted an amendment to the Pathways to Employment program in the federal register to eliminate the age cap, thus, enabling applicants over the age of 25 to qualify.
- Developed a workplan to fully implement rate methodology changes for three Lifespan waiver services: Day Service Transportation, Nursing Consultation and Behavioral Consultation. Detailed information about these changes will be shared during public comment period planned for later this calendar year.