

**LETTER TO FAMILIES**

June 23, 2021

Dear DDDS Service Recipients and Families,

I hope everyone is doing well and getting to enjoy the nice summer weather. Let me wish sincere congratulations to all of the graduates who have finished their schooling in a most unusual time. I hope you all have a chance to celebrate your accomplishments.

In this letter, I want to update you on the status of DDDS services in Delaware while we continue to make our way through the COVID-19 pandemic. We have learned a lot in the past 15 months about what COVID-19 is, how it spreads and how to prevent infection. We now have tools, including three approved vaccines, in addition to our ongoing testing and mitigation strategies, that can support *all* Delawareans to resume their lives (with a healthy dose of continued caution!).

President Biden has set a goal for all states to have 70% of their adult population with at least one dose of the vaccine by July 4<sup>th</sup>. With 69.1% of Delaware adults with at least one vaccine dose as of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, we are so close to achieving that goal. The COVID-19 vaccine is available to anyone age 12 and older, and all three brands of the COVID-19 vaccine are readily available throughout the state. A comprehensive list of vaccination locations is available at <https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine/where-can-i-get-my-vaccine/>.

Remember to check out **DEWins!** (<http://www.dewins.org>) to learn more about some great vaccine incentives. These incentives include everything from a \$10 gift card for those vaccinated at a Curative site or Public Health Clinic through June 29<sup>th</sup>, to twice-weekly drawings for \$5,000 and baseball, concert and vacation packages, to \$302,000 in cash, college scholarships, and low-digit license plates in the final June 30<sup>th</sup> drawing.

While the number of new cases of COVID-19 in Delaware has dropped significantly, it is important to be mindful that the virus is still as serious and dangerous now as it was back in March 2020. Unvaccinated individuals remain at the same risk of serious illness, and tragically death, from COVID-19 as they have been during the entire pandemic. The risk has not been eliminated, which means unvaccinated individuals should continue to protect themselves from exposure as much as possible.

Nothing has been as critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19 as the use of face masks. For that reason, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) will continue to wear face masks while working with service recipients regardless of vaccination status. Likewise, DDDS employees continue to wear face masks in all state buildings or when interacting with service recipients in-person. This pandemic isn't over, and we're committed to continuing to do what we can to keep our service recipients healthy and safe.

As my last letter indicated, day providers are slowly reopening in-person services to more and more service recipients. Recruitment of employees continues to be a struggle for our providers. Please remain in touch with your Columbus Community Navigator, Support Coordinator, Employment Navigator or DDDS Family Resource Unit, in addition to your day provider, for updates as providers continue to welcome back service recipients for in-person services.

You may have heard that Governor Carney has announced he will not extend the State of Emergency order after July 12th. Many of the enhanced benefits the State has been offering, for example enhanced SNAP benefits and some emergency housing options, will also be ending over time. If this change impacts you, I encourage you to reach out to your Columbus Community Navigator.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the challenges endured in the past year. The pandemic was truly unprecedented and forced everyone to adapt to new ways of living. I cannot thank our provider community and the dedicated Direct Support Professionals enough for how they have supported service recipients in new and creative ways, keeping them engaged and safe. Additionally, I thank you, family caregivers, for your patience and flexibility as what initially seemed like a two-week hiatus turned into months and now 15 months of services being modified or shuttered completely. Please know DDDS and the provider network are working together to get as many service recipients back in-person, as safely and as quickly as possible. As always, please reach out to your Columbus Community Navigator, DDDS Support Coordinator and the DDDS Family Resource Unit for supports or guidance. We all look forward to when the pandemic is officially behind us. While we are not there yet, we have made tremendous gains and I'm confident we are well on our way.

Be well,

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP

Director of Community Services