

LETTER TO FAMILIES



February 22, 2022

Dear DDDS Families and Service Recipients,

I hope you are all doing well as we make our way through the winter months. I know I'm certainly looking forward to warmer temperatures and the renewal of energy that spring brings. I'm excited to share this month's update with you all, not only because we appear to have gotten through the Omicron surge, but also to highlight some of the progress the Division continues to make, even in pandemic times.

COVID-19 Cases

Since last month's letter where I detailed the dramatic number of new COVID cases in our network, things have stabilized considerably. While the cases are higher than anyone wants, they are more manageable now and along the lines of the previous months of the pandemic. We have had 26 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) test positive, bringing the total to 1,109. There have been 10 additional cases among service recipients supported in residential habilitation as well, bringing the total to 524.

Since the cases have declined in our communities across the state and in our network, we were able to have in-person, on-site visits resume for DDDS employees, Consultative Behavior Analysts, Consultative Nurses, Columbus Community Navigators and MCO Care Coordinators on February 14th. All Home and Community-Based Service providers continue to be required to wear face masks. Face masks are also still required in all State buildings.

Testing and Vaccination Opportunities

Many of our providers continue to use Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) routinely to identify asymptomatic cases of COVID, among staff and service recipients. Having access to test results in 15 minutes has helped ensure operations can continue safely as we make our way through the pandemic.

Curative sites continue to offer testing throughout the state. You can visit www.curative.com to find a site and schedule an appointment. The State also provides a listing of additional testing options, including free at-home test kits, at de.gov/gettested.

Please get vaccinated and your booster dose if you have not already. You can find vaccine information and locations at www.coronavirus.delaware.gov/vaccine.

At-home vaccinations are being delivered again throughout Delaware. DHSS has partnered with independent pharmacies in each county to deliver the vaccinations to eligible Delawareans 5 and older and their caregivers. All requests for a homebound vaccination or booster are filtered through a toll-free number (1-888-491-4988) to be assessed and scheduled. Live operators staff the toll-free line from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays. To learn more, visit DHSS' website at VaccineAccessDE.com.

Planning for the Future

As we move into an era where we are adjusting and adapting to living with COVID around us, I'm excited that DDDS employees returned, once again, to their office locations on February 14th. Please note many employees are now working a hybrid schedule with some days in the office and some days telecommuting from home. You can continue to reach them via phone or email as usual.

We are planning to resume in-person training of DSPs in April, with strict safety protocols in place. This allows us to shift back to our previous training strategy vs the modified approach we adopted early in the pandemic. The modifications we enacted were sanctioned by CMS via the Appendix K emergency authority, but that authority will expire six months after the official end of the Public Health Emergency, thus we want to be prepared for this eventual end by proactively planning before it ends.

As you know, despite the events over the last 24 months, the Division has continued our work in support of Delawareans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. How or where we worked may have changed, but our employees have remained engaged and active with service recipients. We've been successful in retaining services we had in place before the pandemic, and we've also sought ways to adapt and innovate to meet changing needs and changing times.

For those service recipients with a Columbus Community Navigator, you have experienced the Charting the LifeCourse person-centered planning process for several years. For those service recipients supported in provider-managed residential settings, I'm thrilled to say we are ready to roll out the Charting the LifeCourse person-centered planning process with you as well. DDDS Support Coordinators have already shared with service recipients, family members and guardians an invitation to join the upcoming Family Information Sessions scheduled for March 1st and March 2nd.

Attending one of these sessions will provide you with an opportunity to learn about this new person-centered planning process and the timeframes for implementation. These sessions will be offered via Zoom. Please feel free to join any of the four sessions that work best with your schedule. You can access the links on the DDDS Facebook page, as well as through the flyer that was sent. Please reach out to your Support Coordinator with any questions.

The Division also is continuing to work to improve access to dental care. As you probably know, Delaware Medicaid covers routine oral health care for people over the age of 21. We continue to hear from families about problems they encounter with identifying dental providers who are accessible and available for new patients. Please share your individual experiences with us, by completing this brief (1-minute) survey about accessing dental care.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DDDS_DentalCare We will use the results to help inform other stakeholders as we work to improve access.

I hope you hear the optimism I feel in this month's message. We are making progress and continue to remain committed to reducing the spread of COVID while safely re-connecting.

Be well,



Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services