NJ Human Services Unveils $25 Million Plan to Support Access to Mental Health & Addiction Services During the Pandemic

Initiative Calls for Reimbursing Safety Net Providers for COVID-19-Related Expenses to Help Them Remain Open and Accessible

Sept. 8, 2020

(TRENTON) – Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson today announced that the Department will use federal Coronavirus Relief Fund resources to provide up to $25 million to help mental health and substance use disorder providers remain open and accessible by reimbursing for the added costs they are incurring due to COVID-19. Eligible entities include the more than 250 providers who participate in Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services network that provide prevention, treatment and recovery supports to the uninsured and underinsured.

To provide services to New Jerseyans with mental health and substance use disorders, providers face new costs associated with complying with social distancing requirements, ensuring technology is available to facilitate access to services through telehealth, as well as additional costs for personal protective equipment (PPE), staffing and COVID testing needs. Residential treatment settings, outpatient and recovery clinics, opioid treatment programs, and other behavioral health providers are all facing these new, significant and unplanned expenses.

"Mental health and addiction services for some of the most vulnerable New Jerseyans are always a critical priority, but represent an acute need during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our safety net providers have worked hard to support individuals throughout this crisis but face increased costs to stay open and accessible as they work to comply with public health and safety guidelines," Commissioner Johnson said. "Today, we are committing to help them manage these unexpected costs so that they can deliver critical services to those in need."

Under the plan, eligible mental health and substance use disorder providers will be reimbursed for pandemic-related expenses dating from the Governor's March 9th declaration of a public health emergency through December 20th. Allowable costs must be new expenses resulting from COVID-19 and must not have been previously budgeted.

Qualifying COVID-related expenditures include:

- Personal protective equipment;
- COVID testing for staff and clients;
- COVID-related emergency rates for in-person direct care staff undertaking work involving COVID risks; and
- HIPAA-compliant technology to facilitate telehealth such as tele-mental health and substance use disorder counseling.

This new initiative builds on steps Human Services has taken throughout the pandemic to support mental health and addition services, including:

- Expanding the NJ Mental Health Cares help line (866-202-HELP) and establishing a videophone mental health helpline for American Sign Language users (973-870-0677) to give all New Jerseyans a safe place to talk to someone about the anxiety and fear so many of us have experienced during this challenging time;
- Creating new ways for individuals to access mental health and addiction counseling through dramatically expanding telehealth services, including counseling and other supports;
- Making it easier to access medication assisted treatment for opioid addiction through telehealth and allowing for more take-home medication wherever possible;
- Distributing more than 11,000 doses of the overdose antidote naloxone to Emergency Medical Services throughout the state; and
- Promoting the 844-ReachNJ hotline to assist residents in accessing addiction treatment, including new messaging about the importance of asking about medication to support recovery.

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Disability Programs
Family Programs
Welfare Services
Mental Health
Addiction Services
Aging Services

Divisions

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Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired (CBVI)
Division of Aging Services (DoAS)
Division of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (DDHH)
Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)
Division of Disability Services (DDS)
Division of Family Development (DFD)
Division of Medical Assistance & Health Services (DMAHS)
Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)
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