



State of Vermont

Department of Mental Health
280 State Drive, NOB 2 North
Waterbury, VT 05671-2010
<http://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/>

Agency of Human Services

[phone] 802-241-0090
[fax] 802-241-0100
[tty] 800-253-0191

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mental Health Provider Network
FROM: Sarah Squirrel, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health
DATE: March 26, 2020
SUBJECT: New Executive Order - Essential Services

In an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19, new [Executive Orders](#) from Governor Scott place additional restrictions on Vermonters starting March 25, 2020. This DMH memo reinforces the new orders and guidance about “essential” and “non-essential” services.

Regarding the [Executive Order as it applies to mental health programming](#), all **Designated Agencies, Specialized Service Agencies**, residential treatment programs (PNMI), therapeutic foster parents and shared living providers are considered “healthcare service providers” and “caregivers” of essential services.

In order to honor the intent of the most recent order from Governor Scott to mitigate and slow the spread of COVID-19, it is absolutely critical that providers continue to identify essential services and essential service provision with the health and safety of both staff and recipients in mind.

As a reminder, “Essential Services” are services that assure the health and safety of a person. Essential Services delivered in-person to a consumer may continue if the services cannot be provided in an alternate, remote way such as telehealth, telephone, or other remote platforms. All in-person service delivery must follow precautions previously set forth and found in the [Home Based Service Delivery Guidance](#) on the Department of Mental Health website.

Examples of “essential services” include:

- Emergency Examinations for involuntary hospitalization
- Crisis stabilization/ hospital diversion programs
- Residential treatment programs, including group homes, staffed living and intensive residential
- Therapeutic Foster Care/ shared living homes
- Psychiatric Services
- Nursing services
- Food availability
- Obtaining essential home supplies related to health and sanitation

All non-essential, in-person including home-based services that do not directly contribute to health and safety shall be suspended until further notice. Non-essential services may continue if alternative, remote methods of delivery are available. The determination must be made by the provider of services and is based on individual need and level of risk.

Examples of services that may be “non-essential” for in-person delivery include the following.

- Case Management/Service Coordination
- Community Supports
- Non-urgent Therapy
- Respite
- Supported Employment
- Day Services

Regarding school mental health services (Success Beyond Six), Designated Agencies should coordinate their plan for service delivery during the school closure period with their LEA/SU/SD to make sure they are in agreement. Determination of service delivery should be based on clinical need, family availability and ability to access supports through alternate methods, and adherence to the Executive Orders. More guidance about Success Beyond Six can be found [here](#).

On a related note, the State recognizes that many providers are experiencing financial difficulty as a result of the Executive Orders. Please know that DMH is working with AHS to identify paths for financial relief for providers in this situation.

For additional questions about the delivery of essential home-based services or program guidance, please contact the designated program staff below for technical assistance.

- Children, Youth and Families and Success Beyond Six: Laurel Omland, laurel.omland@vermont.gov
Cell: (802) 279-5012
- Adult Programming:
 - Samantha Sweet, Operations & Care Management Director, samantha.sweet@vermont.gov
Cell: (802) 585-8000
 - Trish Singer, Director, Adult Services Utilization, Patricia.singer@vermont.gov
Cell: (802) 999-7668

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & UPDATES – Please visit the Vermont Health Department’s, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention OR the Department of Mental Health website at:

- <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/infectious-disease/2019-novel-coronavirus>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- <https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/information-coronavirus-covid-19>

Please send questions to AHS.DMHCOVID19Info@vermont.gov