



Illinois Department of Human Services

JB Pritzker, Governor

Grace B. Hou, Secretary

Division of Mental Health

401 South Clinton, 2nd Floor • Chicago, Illinois 60607

October 21, 2021

Dear providers,

Earlier today, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) announced a \$65.4M investment in the behavioral health safety net. I applaud Secretary Hou and Director Eagleson for their leadership and for their commitment to the mental well-being of Illinoisans.

This is a difficult time for community behavioral health providers. The IDHS Division of Mental Health (DMH) is keenly aware of the ongoing challenges that you are facing - challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic, impacting our workforce and the people we serve.

Over the last year and a half, DMH has worked diligently to make changes and provide solutions to help mitigate these challenges.

At the outset of the pandemic, DMH took swift action to support the mental health safety net through an infusion of \$7.8 million in funding to Community Mental Health Centers so they could continue operations, cover payroll, purchase PPE, and adapt their services to a COVID-19 environment.

Throughout the pandemic, DMH has met regularly with State and City agencies - including HFS, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) - as well as with multiple trade associations and other stakeholders. Together, we've reviewed systems and processes impacting service provision and the workforce, and DMH has listened for new and emerging opportunities.

As an example, since April 2021, DMH has led over fifteen solution-focused work-group meetings with HFS and community mental health providers to strengthen team-based services. By collaborating to address critical staffing and programmatic challenges, the workgroup has identified and implemented program revisions aimed at improving access to care for consumers and maintaining quality services.

Thanks to your commitment, resourcefulness, and adaptability, the mental health safety net remains intact.

We know that critical challenges remain, however, including a growing workforce shortage, the pressure of increased safety protocols, and the professional and personal stresses on each person in the system. DMH remains committed to addressing these challenges in partnership with you. To this end, I want to share several efforts that are underway:

Expanded Financial Support

FY 22 Sustainability Payments: DMH is working to make approximately \$13M in retention payments to providers in the coming weeks. We understand the urgency and have explored multiple options for providing funding in a quick and efficient manner. Providers should expect to receive funding via grants for the gaps in fee for service payments between pre-pandemic and FY21 billing levels. Entities eligible for these funds will need to be “GATA-eligible” which requires:

- Having a current [DUNS](#) number
- Having a current [SAM](#) cage code
- Registering and accessing the [Centralized Repository Vault](#) (CRV) and the [CSA Tracking System](#)
- Registering with the [GATA system](#)
- Completing and submitting an Internal Controls Questionnaire (ICQ) on the [GATA system](#)
- Registering and being in good standing with the [Secretary of State](#) (N/A for government entities and schools)

COVID Mitigation: In FY22, DMH and the DHS Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (SUPR) received \$3.4M from SAMHSA for provider COVID mitigation efforts. We recently submitted a plan to SAMHSA that will allow DMH and SUPR to contract with one vendor to make COVID mitigation supplies and services available to providers. These include:

- COVID Diagnostic Testing and related materials
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Sanitation Equipment
- Mobile Air Purification Systems

Once approved by SAMHSA, we will work quickly to roll out this program.

Behavioral Health Workforce: DMH has worked with community partners, trade associations, sister agencies, and other stakeholders to better understand the opportunities and threats to the behavioral health workforce, both in community care and in state-operated hospitals and state programs and services. To address the crisis, DMH has several initiatives underway. They include:

- **A Behavioral Health Workforce Center:** With a \$6M investment of cannabis tax revenue, DMH is funding the Behavioral Health Workforce Center authorized by P.A. 102-4 (Illinois Health Care and Human Service Reform Act). The Workforce Center

will benefit the public and private mental health systems by engaging other universities and stakeholders, providing needed research and analysis, and developing and implementing a plan with recommendations to strengthen the mental health workforce for the future.

- **Student Loan Repayment:** In partnership with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, DMH is implementing a student loan repayment program to support recruitment and retention goals for safety net mental health services. \$5M from cannabis tax revenue has been allocated to this effort. It is expected to launch officially in summer 2022.
- **Training and certification for persons with lived mental health expertise:** Using cannabis tax revenue, DMH issued an \$8M grant opportunity for Illinois Higher Education institutions to recruit and train individuals with lived expertise in mental health and substance use recovery to enter the behavioral health workforce. Related grants should be issued by January 2022.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment and partnership to help us maintain the mental health safety net. I look forward to continuing to work with you to provide critical mental health care to our most vulnerable neighbors in communities across Illinois.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Albert', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Albert, PhD
Director
IDHS Division of Mental Health