



## DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

*Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona*

# DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## DDD ACTIONS RELATED TO COVID-19

**April 3, 2020**

**Updated April 13, April 28, June 15**

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to health and supportive service delivery across the world. Pandemic mitigation strategies are critical for limiting the spread of COVID-19 but also impact service delivery and traditional methods of access to services.

DDD's top priority continues to be the health & safety of members, families, and the professionals in our system that support them, and the Division has been actively working to ensure appropriate measures are in place to allow for the continuation of necessary services in a safe manner for members and providers. DDD is actively monitoring service delivery and availability to ensure essential services continue to be available to members during the pandemic throughout various stages of mitigation strategies required by public health officials.

DDD recognizes that the pandemic also has significant impacts on the vendor community, in the form of member absences from programs and staff absenteeism. Continued financial viability of our vendors is critical to ensuring services are available to our members. DDD has already taken a number of steps to relieve administrative burden for vendors and continues to seek ways to accommodate these challenging times while still ensuring member needs are met and health & safety standards are in place.

### **HOW ARE WE ENGAGING MEMBERS, FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS?**

#### **Member Outreach**

DDD recognizes the need for communication during this changing environment. The easiest way for members, families and providers to access information is through the [DDD COVID-19 webpage](#), which is updated regularly regarding actions DDD is taking in response to COVID-19.

DDD has also conducted outreach to its members to educate them about the COVID-19 pandemic in a more easily understood manner. Plain language bulletins, flyers, visuals, and videos have been posted to the DDD COVID-19 webpage, along with links to reputable sources including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). Messages have been posted on Facebook and through stakeholder/advocacy organizations to direct members and families to the DDD website for the most real-time updates. DDD Support Coordinators have been contacting those members without access to the Internet to ensure that they have up to date information.

Since the start of the COVID-19 emergency, Support Coordinators have contacted over 35,000 members in the system who did not have a scheduled planning meeting to provide them with information including the website so they have access to regular updates, as well as communication about how to engage their Support Coordinators if they do not have regular internet access and need additional assistance.

DDD is also increasing our staff communication and information sharing so that staff have the most up-to-date information when communicating with family members.

Finally, in light of the need for more frequent communication and dialogue around COVID-19, DDD has increased the frequency of its [town hall meetings](#) for all members, families and providers. DDD has held weekly town hall meetings every Thursday beginning April 2 with specific focus on COVID-19 updates. This is in addition to the meetings DDD staff are attending for the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) and the Arizona Association of Providers for People with Disabilities (AAPPD). DDD staff and leadership are making themselves available to the extent possible to be able to update the I/DD community on the steps we are taking. This frequent communication and representation also allows DDD to hear from the community regarding the concerns they are facing, which DDD has worked to address.

Additionally, DDD is updating the Actions Related to COVID-19 webpage with additional resources for members, families, caregivers, and providers around emotional health and resilience. These same updates are regularly being sent to all DDD staff so that they have the most recent information and can properly respond to questions from members and families.

### **Service Delivery and Support from DDD Staff**

DDD is also monitoring service delivery, conducting virtual meetings with members and families (instead of in-person), allowing additional services to be delivered via telehealth and educating members, families and providers about COVID-19 and strategies to stay safe and healthy. This includes direct outreach by DDD staff for members without access to the Internet..

DDD Support Coordinators have called thousands of DDD members and additional DDD staff have called hundreds of vendors and providers to assess the current situation. These calls include questions to members and families regarding how COVID-19 is impacting the services they are receiving and any related outstanding needs they may have, as well as evaluating how possible future mitigation strategies might impact them.

DDD is also making changes to find alternative methods for service delivery and related administrative supports that minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure. These include changes such as:

- Allowing Day Treatment providers to provide services in a member's home rather than having multiple members travel to a Day Treatment site.
- Conducting Support Coordination Planning Meetings via video conferencing or telephone call
- Performing quality assurance monitoring via a desk audit except in instances involving serious health and safety threats.

Finally, DDD recognizes the potential mental health impact that prolonged social distancing may have among our members. To that end, we have instructed our subcontracted DDD Health Plan providers, who have primary responsibility for behavioral health services to our members, to develop strategies specifically to address potential negative behavioral health impacts on our members, including service delivery that will provide behavioral health care to members in whatever settings they are residing. DDD has provided a list of peer and family support agencies for members, families, and staff to contact for identifying possible support and guidance. AHCCCS changes to telehealth policy will also allow expanded access to these services for DDD members.

DDD has published additional information for specific services that have been made available during the COVID-19 emergency. The first service change is the [provision of home delivered meals](#) for eligible members when they do not have other means to procure food and prepare a meal or have a meal prepared for them by a caregiver. Additionally, DDD issued guidance allowing [parents to serve as paid caregivers for minor children](#) and outlining the process for determining when such a service is appropriate. DDD also established guidance

and requirements around the provision of [habilitation and employment via telehealth](#).

## Provider Outreach and Guidance

DDD is in regular communication with its vendors and providers through its standard communication channels, as well as making communications available on the DDD Actions Related to COVID-19 webpage. We are following guidance and expertise from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) related to preventing exposure and managing suspected cases. In addition, we are connecting with other states regarding best practices in these areas and distributing relevant information to vendors and providers about actions to take during this unprecedented time.

Examples of this provider communication include:

- As a part of the Qualified Vendor Agreement, all providers are required to have a plan for handling Pandemics prior to being contracted as a qualified vendor. On March 11, 2020, all DDD vendors were sent a reminder to have their [pandemic plans updated](#) in preparation for the weeks ahead. Providers have been requested to review their plans, ensure they can be implemented, and make updates if necessary
- DDD has also urged its providers to follow protocols issued by the CDC and ADHS when it comes to both facilities and guidance for healthcare workers. DDD has followed up with all state operated, contracted, and sub-contracted Assisted Living Facilities, Intermediate Care Facilities, and Skilled Nursing Facilities to ensure they are [implementing safety measures](#) as designated in the Governor's Executive Order issued on March 11, 2020. Group homes, which are not subject to the Executive Order, have been encouraged to take similar safety measures. Subsequent to the March 11 announcement, ADHS has since issued guidance that there should not be visits to long-term care facilities except to provide critical assistance, which DDD is also following.
- DDD has issued specific [guidance for congregate settings](#) (group homes, day treatment programs, and developmental homes) regarding best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to update it as more information becomes available, most recently updated on June 2, 2020. DDD has [provided information](#) for facilities and congregate settings about what to do in the event a resident is diagnosed with COVID-19. This guidance is consistent with ADHS and CDC recommendations. On April 3, 2020, DDD provided updated guidance to these settings which included options for alternative living arrangements in limited circumstances, as well as enhanced funding for services to members with COVID-19. DDD recognizes there are unique challenges for facilities and congregate settings serving members with developmental disabilities, and DDD is actively working to identify other placement opportunities for members who live in group homes who test positive for COVID-19, if the specific circumstances of the member's situation warrants an alternative placement.
- DDD has issued a variety of guidance to its qualified vendors including information on social distancing, hygiene and disinfection, expanding the use of telehealth, allowing day treatment providers to provide in-home services to maintain member access to these services, and more. This information has been sent out directly to vendors and posted on the DDD website.

As guidance and information is evolving, DDD is developing additional information for providers such as providing [suggested activities](#) for members in congregate settings can safely participate in while maintaining social distance. This includes activity file boxes based on members' preferences & sensory needs, as well as virtual tours of museums, zoos and other activities.

There is a worldwide shortage of PPE with many concurrent strategies being implemented to increase the availability of PPE in Arizona. The Governor has charged ADHS with overseeing distribution of available PPE in Arizona; ADHS has delegated distribution decisions to local health departments and, in accordance with this

direction, DDD providers are working with their local health departments to access PPE.

Additionally, the Director of the Department of Economic Security has submitted a letter on behalf of DDD to all county health departments outlining the unique needs of DDD group homes, requesting they be prioritized for PPE distribution.

DDD has provided additional and updated guidance documents around a variety of topics to assist qualified vendors and providers serve members. The first document is [updated guidance for congregate settings](#) including the latest recommendations from CDC and ADHS. This update also provided clarified guidance for residential settings and center-based sites. DDD also updated its [Reporting COVID-19 and Technical Assistance document](#) to provide further clarification and guidance. DDD has continued to solicit feedback from vendors providing all services through the use of surveys tailored to the service provided in order to gauge the state of service delivery across the state. DDD posted a new procedure for how Qualified Vendors should report to DDD if they are aware of a DDD member they support who has tested positive for COVID-19. DDD continues to work with Qualified Vendors and providers to ensure they have the resources and technical assistance to deliver services using CDC, ADHS, and DDD guidance. This guidance includes CMS guidance on the use of separate staffing teams to support members who have tested positive for COVID-19. DDD has also held conference calls with [Group Home and Developmental Home](#) providers to discuss issues surrounding COVID-19 mitigation strategies and hear from vendors regarding questions and concerns related to the COVID-19 emergency.

## **WHAT ARE WE DOING TO SUPPORT PROVIDERS FINANCIALLY?**

DDD recognizes that the pandemic has significant impacts on the vendor community, in the form of member absences from programs, staff absenteeism and increased costs associated with cleaning/disinfecting and PPE. Continued vendor financial viability is critical to ensuring services are available to our members.

DDD has already taken a number of steps to relieve administrative burden for vendors and continues to seek ways to accommodate these challenging times while still ensuring member needs are met and health & safety standards are in place.

### **Value-Based Payments**

DDD has established several types of value-based payments to support providers experiencing increased costs associated with the COVID-19 emergency or are having particular challenges in retaining staff. Vendors and providers have been surveyed multiple times since the COVID-19 emergency began with the most recent surveys being sent out on [May 27, 2020](#). The value-based arrangement requires providers to complete the surveys mentioned above to receive their payment because the data collected through the provider surveys is critical for determining ongoing strategies. Approximately 471 vendors have received incentive payments since March 2020 totaling \$21.2 million dollars.

DDD introduced [temporary rate increases](#) to address a significant concern DDD has heard from the provider community related to retention and recruitment of direct care workers providing services including Attendant Care, Habilitation, Group Homes, Independent Living Arrangements and Respite. Direct care worker retention challenges are present across multiple provider types, but are particularly acute in Group Homes, which account for nearly 40% of DDD's overall utilization and where managing the spread of COVID-19 presents unique challenges. These temporary rate increases will allow providers to pay their workers at a rate that will encourage them to continue working. In order to receive the incentives, Qualified Vendors must agree to distribute at least 80% of the incentive adjustment amount to the direct care staff in the form of a temporary increase in salary, wages, stipends, and related ERE costs. DDD has extended the time frame in which vendors can bill for the temporary incentive rates for specific services (outlined below) until July 3, 2020, to ensure

they can continue to support their direct care staff during the COVID-19 emergency. In response to new service delivery methods, DDD has developed rates for new staffing ratios, such as one to one, for services that didn't historically have rates for lower ratios.

Members who test positive for COVID-19 and who are still able to remain in their residence will continue to need care from direct care workers. DDD is working with vendors to establish creative solutions to keep members and workers safe but still ensure necessary care is provided. At a minimum, the solution includes enhanced rates specific to members who test positive for COVID-19 to incentivize direct care workers to care for these members.

DES continues to evaluate opportunities to support a broader array of providers through value-based arrangements. These payments are one aspect of a larger strategy designed to preserve access to care for members both during and after the COVID-19 emergency.

## **Other Resources**

DDD also communicated information about the [federal resources for small businesses](#) such as the Paycheck Protection Program to its providers as another critical resource vendors can use to support their financial viability through the pandemic.

Additionally, as explained above, service delivery changes such as allowing [Day Treatment vendors](#) to provide services in a member's home will provide additional financial support for them while preserving member access to care.

Again, we recognize the need for continued monitoring of these changing provider circumstances so we can develop strategies that address the concrete issues providers are experiencing and make informed decisions on what steps should be taken to address health and safety and member needs.

As outlined above, DDD recognizes the COVID-19 response is ongoing and requires adjustment based on the many changing factors of both the response to the pandemic as well as public health mitigation strategies. While the below is a current summary of DDD actions, it will be updated based on additional strategies identified to meet the changing needs of its members, families and providers.