



Georgia Department of Behavioral Health
& Developmental Disabilities

Judy Fitzgerald, Commissioner

Division of Behavioral Health

To: All Regions and DBHDD-Contracted PATH Providers
From: Maxwell Ruppensburg, Director, Office of Supportive Housing, DBHDD
Date: April 7, 2020
Re: Guidance for PATH Teams during COVID-19 Health Crisis

In response to the statewide Shelter in Place order and Public Health State of Emergency in Georgia as a result of COVID-19, as well as the increasing pressures placed on the homeless and behavioral health system across the state, DBHDD and the Office of Supportive Housing is making programmatic accommodations and issuing guidance for PATH Team providers around the state.

During this time, it remains critical that PATH Teams continue to remain active so that vulnerable individuals in need continue to receive services and support. We will continue to adapt and respond to the rapidly changing environment in which we are operating around the state.

Currently in effect, all Supportive Housing Referrals, once approved, will receive a Notice to Proceed for GHVP and are not being asked to apply first for alternative resources. We will continue to do our best to make programmatic accommodations to support our providers and the individuals we serve.

PATH Teams should follow the below guidance:

1. Continue serving individuals enrolled in PATH services, utilizing telephonic or virtual communication whenever possible and in-person whenever necessary, using appropriate safeguards.
2. Maintaining outreach efforts while taking necessary efforts to limit risks of exposure.
3. Continue facilitating the NSH assessment and referral process.
4. Regular communication and coordination with local partner agencies and Continuums of Care.
6. Ensure all client data and service interaction is accurate, current, and properly reflected in HMIS.
7. Help educate clients and colleagues about best practices for maintaining personal health and safety and for reducing the likelihood of exposure and spread of COVID-19.
8. Utilize the HUD COVID-19 Screening Tool and stay up to date on CDC guidance on COVID-19.
9. Assist individuals who are currently enrolled in PATH or referred by PATH for housing with their Georgia Housing Voucher Program (GHVP) renewals as needed.
10. Coordinate with the DBHDD Regional Field Office for any referrals for individuals that are discharging from the state hospital who are homeless and in need of supportive housing.
11. Coordinate with the Housing Outreach Coordinator for referrals for individuals transitioning from a jail or prison.
12. Continue to maintain compliance with contract deliverables and communicate regularly with the Office of Supportive Housing regarding any identified needs or challenges. We are here to help!

This guidance remains in effect until further notice and we will provide further updates as soon as the situation changes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided the following interim guidance for homeless services outreach workers based on what is currently known about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The CDC is updating this interim guidance as additional information becomes available.

When COVID-19 is spreading in your community, assign outreach staff who are at higher risk for severe illness to other duties. Advise outreach staff who will be continuing outreach activities on how to protect themselves and their clients from COVID-19 in the course of their normal duties. Instruct staff to:

- Greet clients from a distance of 6 feet and explain that you are taking additional precautions to protect yourself and the client from COVID-19.

- Screen clients for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 by asking them if they have a fever, new or worsening cough, or shortness of breath.
 - If the client has a cough, immediately provide them with a surgical mask to wear.
 - If urgent medical attention is necessary, use standard outreach protocols to facilitate access to healthcare.
- Continue conversations and provision of information while maintaining 6 feet of distance.
- Maintain good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) on a regular basis.
- Wear gloves if you need to handle client belongings. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer (>60% alcohol) before and after wearing gloves.
- If at any point you do not feel that you are able to protect yourself or your client from the spread of COVID-19, discontinue the interaction and notify your supervisor. Examples include if the client declines to wear a mask or if you are unable to maintain a distance of 6 feet.
- Provide all clients with hygiene products, when available.
- Street medicine and healthcare worker outreach staff should review and follow recommendations for healthcare workers.
- Review stress and coping resources for yourselves and your clients during this time.

The work of PATH Teams and the provider network remains critical and ever needed during this time of crisis for so many around the state. Please continue to exercise personal caution and recommended physical distancing and hygiene practices to safeguard the health of yourself and those around you.

DBHDD Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald has issued a [letter of exemption](#) explaining the Governor’s Shelter in Place order does not apply to DBHDD provider staff. It is not necessary to use this letter under the law.

Please be sure to regularly check the [CDC](#) and [Georgia DPH](#) websites for the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and remember to be vigilant about personal hygiene.

If you have additional questions that relate to COVID-19 please submit them to the provider relations email so that they are properly tracked. That email is DBHDD.Provider@DBHDD.GA.GOV

We appreciate everything you do!

cc:

Monica Johnson, Director, Division of Behavioral Health, DBHDD
 Adrian Johnson, Assistant Director, Division of Behavioral Health, DBHDD
 Letitia Robinson, Assistant Director, Office of Supportive Housing, DBHDD
 David Whisnant, Division Director, Housing Assistance Division, DCA
 Cynthia Patterson, Director, Office of Homeless and Special Needs Housings, DCA

DBHDD-Contracted Providers of PATH Services:

DBHDD Region	Provider Agency
1	Hope Atlanta
2	Serenity
3	Community Friendship, Inc. (CFI)
3	St. Joseph Mercy Care
3	Hope Atlanta
3	Grady Hospital
3	Community Advance Practice Nurses (CAPN)
4	Legacy Behavioral Health Services
5	Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH)
6	New Horizons CSB