



November 16, 2020

Dear Health Care Providers:

Thank you for serving on the frontlines of health care. As you are aware, as the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched on, it has taken a toll on the mental health of children and adults worldwide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data on the impact of COVID-19 on American households, Nevadans are struggling with unemployment and food scarcity at higher rates than the rest of the United States. In addition, since March, at least 60% of U.S. adults have reported feeling anxious for at least a few days each week and about half of U.S. adults report feeling depressed for at least a few days each week. The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Division of Child and Family Services, and Division of Health Care Financing and Policy are reaching out to provide tools and resources (pages 3 & 4) to support behavioral health prevention and early intervention efforts.

**The COVID-19 Pandemic is an Adverse Childhood Experience.** The pandemic has been especially hard for children and families, who are coping with disruption in routines and relationships. Many Nevada children are currently being educated under distance or hybrid learning models, increasing stress on children and families over and above the other stressors of the pandemic. This is particularly concerning for children and adolescents who may be experiencing the cumulative effects of multiple adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. ACEs are specific types of traumatic experiences that occur during childhood. Long-term studies have demonstrated that ACEs are linked with chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic's significant impact on children's sense of safety and stability, we are conceptualizing it as an ACE to which all children have been exposed. The necessary public health measures put in place to flatten the curve and mitigate the population-level effects of COVID-19 such as social distancing, school closures, and restrictions on gatherings are likely exacerbating other ACEs by increasing intra-familial adversity and exposing children to increased parental stress related to job loss, food insecurity, and housing insecurity. Over the course of the pandemic we have seen decreases in reports to child protective services (due to a decrease in calls from schools), increases in calls to children's mobile crisis hotlines, and an increase in youth suicides. All Nevadans need to be vigilant – aware and responsive to the signs of a mental health crisis, suicide risk, or child abuse and neglect.

**Mental Health Screenings are a Medicaid Billable Service.** Chances are that any family that comes into your practice right now is experiencing pandemic-related stress. This includes parents and caregivers. You have the opportunity to screen, intervene and prevent the long-term behavioral health consequences of the pandemic, including youth suicide. Mental health screenings are a billable service for most enrolled Nevada Medicaid providers by using CPT code 96127 – Brief Emotional and Behavioral Assessment. Identifying risk during this screen can indicate a potential need for referral and possibly a need for immediate action. For any billing-related challenges, contact Gainwell Customer Service at (877) 638-3472 or you can reach your Provider Representative based on your provider type:

[https://www.medicaid.nv.gov/Downloads/provider/Team\\_Territories.pdf](https://www.medicaid.nv.gov/Downloads/provider/Team_Territories.pdf)

Please review the attached resources for screening and referral information which have been provided to assist you. Together, we can reduce suicide and the pain of mental and behavioral health need.

**Don't Forget Yourself.** You may be feeling stressed, anxious, overwhelmed or burned out by practicing on the front lines. Health care workers are at higher risk of suicide and mental health difficulties. You are not alone. If you want to talk to someone, there are professionals ready to support you to keep supporting others. Reach out to the Nevada HealthCARES Warmline! This free, confidential, anonymous support line for Nevada's health care workers is available Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m to 8:00 p.m. They are there to listen at 1-833-434-0385.

We are grateful for your continued efforts to keep Nevadans safe and healthy.

Respectfully,



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## Resources and Tools

### **There is no way to know if someone is in trouble unless you ask.**

There are tools and resources you can offer that can save a life. The National Institute on Mental Health developed the Ask Suicide-Screening Questions ([NIMH ASQ](#)), four questions in 20 seconds that can be used to identify people at risk of suicide. In an NIMH study, a “yes” response to one or more questions identified 97% of youth aged 10 to 21 at risk of suicide:

1. In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?
2. In the past few weeks, have you felt that you or your family would be better off if you were dead?
3. In the past week, have you been having thoughts about killing yourself?
4. Have you ever tried to kill yourself?

Please follow this link: [NIMH ASQ](#) to access the full screening tool, toolkit, and clinical pathway. A “yes” response to any one of these questions indicates the need for further questioning (i.e., “Are you having thoughts of killing yourself right now?”) as well as the need for further safety assessment. **A yes to any of the questions on the NIMH ASQ indicates possible risk and the patient cannot leave until evaluated for safety.** A positive screen indicates need for action and potential referral. Please access the [NIMH ASQ](#) for details.

### **Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and a gun may save a life.**

Reducing access to lethal means, such as firearms and medication, can determine whether a person at risk for suicide lives or dies. As a health care provider, **you can:** (1) identify people who could benefit from lethal means counseling, (2) ask about their access to lethal methods, and (3) work with them—and their families—to reduce access. Formal training is available on counseling patients and caregivers on reducing access to the methods people use to kill themselves. To learn more or take the Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training please [visit the Zero Suicide website.](#)

### **Local Mobile Resource**

The Division of Child and Family Services Children’s Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide crisis triage, assessment, and stabilization in the family’s location of choice. Call 702-486-7865 in Southern and rural Nevada or 775-688-1670 in Northern Nevada, or visit [knowcrisis.com](#)

### **Resources for Providers**

[Are You Working to Help People Affected by COVID-19?](#)

[Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event](#)

[Caring for Patients' Mental Well-Being During Coronavirus: A Guide for Clinicians](#)

[After a loved one dies - How children grieve and how parents and other adults can support them](#)

[Self-Care Advice for Health Care Providers](#)

### **Resources for Parents/Caregivers**

[Supporting Kids during the Coronavirus Crisis](#)

[Answering Your Young Child's Questions about Coronavirus](#)

[Mask Up! Talking to Young Children about Wearing Masks](#)

[Supporting Children Who are Worried about Coronavirus](#)

### **Resources for Youth**

For older youth or youth seeking detailed information: [A Kids Book About COVID-19 \(free e-book download\)](#)

For younger children: [Covibook \(available in 25 languages\)](#)

### **Resources for Substance Use**

For certified treatment providers visit <https://behavioralhealthnv.org/> or call **Foundation for Recovery Warmline: 1-800-509-7762.**

### **ACEs and Suicide**

Individuals with four or more ACEs are 37.5 times as likely to attempt suicide when compared to individuals with no ACEs<sup>12</sup>. For more information on addressing ACEs in your clinical practice, visit [www.ACEsAware.org](http://www.ACEsAware.org).

### **Other Tools and Resources**

For COVID-19 emotional support, please call **Crisis Support Services of Nevada or 2-1-1** where you can access Crisis Counselors trained in psychological first aid and disaster response.

**If you or someone else needs support, a trained crisis counselor can be reached by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) or by texting TALK to 741741.**

- Personas que hablan español, llamen a Lifeline al 888-682-9454.
- For teens, call the TEEN LINE at 310-855-4673 or text TEEN to 839863.
- For veterans, call the Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1.
- For LGBTQ youth, call The Trevor Project at 866-488-7386 or text START to 678678.
- For transgender people, call the Trans Lifeline at 877-565-8860.
- For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, call the Lifeline at 800-799-4889.
- For law enforcement personnel, call the COPLINE at 800-267-5463.
- For other first responders, call the Fire/EMS Helpline at 888-731-FIRE (3473)