Update Memo From Director Criss Regarding Telehealth Services

Dear community providers,

You are an essential part of Ohio’s healthcare system. Your work is critical to the health and wellness of Ohioans. With the COVID-19 crisis, we are seeing unprecedented attention to mental health. Our top priority is to ensure access to care for people living with mental illness and addiction, whether they are in service now or new to the system. We know that with social distancing, this is creating unique challenges for the behavioral health system.

We urge you to ensure that the people in your care have continued access to medications, counseling, case management, peer support, and other critical services that you provide. And we know that you have the responsibility to protect your workforce. At this time, there is no guidance specific to behavioral healthcare. Use the guidance found through coronavirus.ohio.gov which links to the CDC and the most up to date information on protecting healthcare workers.

We expect that the ODM and OhioMHAS rules and the accompanying Executive Order will be issued imminently. We urge you to begin using telehealth to reach out to the adults and families in your care. Please take the actions that you need to take to save lives and serve the patients in your community – these actions are related to COVID-19 and to the often life-threatening mental illness and addictions. Document the decisions you are making with your own policies and protocol, and we will continue to work together to implement the practice and emergency rules once filed.

We are impressed -- though in no way surprised -- with how providers, boards, recovery communities, families, and our many community partners are working to ensure that a full contingency of treatment and recovery supports are available to local citizens to the extent possible. There is so much creative and collaborative work underway. We are making every effort at the state to remove barriers and provide resources for you to continue in this work. It is vital that you communicate to your community partners and the general public which programs and services remain open in your behavioral healthcare organization. Publish your phone numbers and other contact information. Reach out to current clients through email or by phone. People need to know that behavioral health is open for business.

If you have specific questions, needs, or ideas to share with us, please email them to COVID19BH@mha.ohio.gov. We are monitoring this throughout each day.

With gratitude and respect,

Lori