



# DMHAS Update

Winter 2023

## Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta



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As we turn the page on the calendar to the month of December, many of us find this to be a time of reflection. As some revel in the pageantry and joy of the holiday season, for others it can bring exacerbated feelings of anxiety and stress. Self-care can be an important tool to manage mental health challenges during stressful times. Taking a few minutes every day to practice gratitude can have a positive and long-lasting impact. Research has also shown that the simple act of reminding yourself of the positive things in your life – such as the roof over your head or food on your plate – can invoke feelings of thankfulness and optimism that make managing stress, depression or anxiety easier. As part of your holiday wellness practice, I urge everyone to take a moment and reflect upon the things you are thankful for, big and small.

As I reflect upon the recent happenings and accomplishments detailed in this newsletter, I feel grateful that I am able to work with a group of dedicated professionals who provide service and support that fosters dignity, respect, and self-sufficiency in those we serve every day. Thank you to our staff and community partners for all that you do to make a difference. I wish you and yours a safe and healthy holiday season.

## 10 Ways to Support a Loved One in Recovery During the Holidays



Each year it feels like the holidays start earlier and earlier, the expectations are larger, and the pressure even more so. While the holidays are often filled with great moments, memories, and fun times, they are hard for so many. While it's a season of giving and togetherness, it can also trigger memories of lost loved ones, feelings of loneliness, or just high levels of stress. It can be an even more complicated time for those in recovery from substance or alcohol use disorders or a mental health condition. So as we make our way through the season, let's look at how we can best support loved ones in recovery. [Read more.](#)

(Article courtesy of [The Hub](#))

## DMHAS Facilities Receive National Healthcare Service Corps Site Designation

All six of DMHAS' state-operated outpatient facilities have been approved as National Healthcare Service Corps (NHSC) sites. The

**HRSA**

NATIONAL HEALTH  
SERVICE CORPS 

NHSC is a federal program that provides scholarships and repays the educational loans of primary care physicians and other health care providers who agree to serve a minimum of two years in federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA).

With the goal of recruiting and retaining professionals within their field of expertise in eligible HPSAs, the NHSC has worked to increase access to quality health care in communities with significant health professional shortages. The NHSC currently supports more than 20,000 primary care medical, dental, and behavioral health providers through scholarships and loan repayment programs.

“Connecticut’s urban areas, where our State-Operated Local Mental Health Authorities are located, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 and opioid crises. Connecticut has seen elevated reports of mental health concerns and substance misuse,” said DMHAS Commissioner Nancy Navarretta. “This NHSC designation will assist DMHAS in its competitive recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals which, in turn, will help to increase our capacity to provide mental health and substance use disorder treatment across our state system of behavioral healthcare.”

The NHSC-approved DMHAS sites are Capitol Region Mental Health Center (Hartford), Connecticut Mental Health Center (New Haven), River Valley Services (Middletown), Southwestern Connecticut Mental Health System (Bridgeport), Southeastern Mental Health Authority (Norwich), and Western Connecticut Mental Health Network (Danbury/Torrington/Waterbury).

For more information about the NHSC and its programs, please visit <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov>.

## New Region 1 Campaign: OK to Talk About It



Region 1 Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization, The Hub, recently debuted a new campaign designed to get people talking about mental health. Entitled, “It’s OK to Talk About It,” the campaign works to break down stigma by normalizing conversations about mental health.

There are many reasons people don't talk about mental health, but stigma is one of the main factors. Stigma is defined as "a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something." When it comes to mental health, there are many beliefs that our society and certain cultures have that are untrue.

Be sure to check out the website, [www.oktotalkaboutit.org](http://www.oktotalkaboutit.org). In addition to the digital campaign, It’s OK to Talk About It will also be featured on billboards and train platform ads in Southwestern Connecticut.

## Connecticut Sentencing Commission Symposium

DMHAS was well represented at the recent [Connecticut Sentencing Commission](#) Symposium, entitled “Mental Health and the Criminal Legal System in Connecticut.” A conversation about mental health and the criminal legal system in Connecticut, speakers discussed key issues related to mental health across the continuum of criminal justice intercepts and opportunities for collaborative efforts to improve outcomes.

Christopher Burke, DMHAS Forensic Services Division Assistant Director, moderated the Mental Health, Policing, and Diversion panel, on which Director of Evidence-Based Practices and Grants, Dana Begin, also sat. Dr. Michael Norko, DMHAS Forensic Policy Advisor, delivered the keynote, *Perspectives on the Mental Health/Criminal Justice System Interface*, and Dr. Reena Kapoor, DMHAS Forensic Services Division Director, participated on the Competency to Stand Trial panel.

The Sentencing Commission is an independent state criminal justice agency established by law in 2011 to conduct criminal justice policy research. The Commission is a body of senior criminal justice system leaders who convene to coordinate systemic responses to criminal justice problems.



## 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Collaborates with Leading Open-Air Shopping Centers to Promote 988 Lifeline

In partnership with seven of the nation’s leading open-air shopping center owners, the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) (988 Lifeline) and [Vibrant Emotional Health](#) (Vibrant), the administrator of the 988 Lifeline, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), announced the installation of more than 8,400 “Signs of HOPE,” across 1,450 shopping centers in 40 U.S. states to increase awareness of emotional support services for those in distress.

Installation of the 12” x 18” weather-resistant metal signs, primarily on parking lot light poles, began in September, with full roll-out expected by year-end 2024. These reflective signs, visible at all hours, highlight the multiple ways to reach the 988 Lifeline and its critical mental health services. Some of these signs have recently started showing up in the western part of Connecticut.

For life-saving crisis support and resources, please call or text 988 or chat online at [988lifeline.org/chat/](https://988lifeline.org/chat/). Support is also available in Spanish by texting AYUDA to 988.



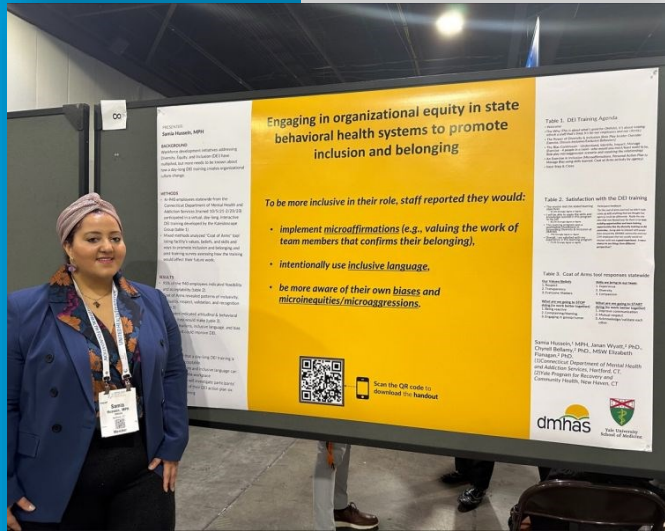


## Congratulations and Acknowledgments



DMHAS Chief Medical Officer, Charles Dike, M.D., has been elected President of the [American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law](#) (AAPL) Executive Council. The AAPL is an organization of psychiatrists dedicated to excellence in practice, teaching, and research in forensic psychiatry. Founded in 1969, AAPL currently has over 2,000 members in North America and around the world.

The theme of Dr. Dike's presidency year is *Forensic Treatment, Ethics, and Administration: Infusing Hope in a Dark World*. It is Dr. Dike's goal to highlight the hard work of providing care to justice involved patients in forensic hospitals and prisons and to spotlight and identify the staff as agents of light bringing hope to these individuals. [Read more here.](#)



DMHAS [Office of Mental Health Equity](#) Director, Samia Hussein, recently presented at a poster session at the [American Public Health Association](#) Annual Meeting and Expo in Atlanta. Samia's session focused on how a day-long Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training contributes to organizational culture change.

As part of her methodology, she looked at DMHAS' DEI work, outcomes from the DEI training initiative, and gaps in research they are hoping to address.

[Click here to see the abstract.](#)



Congratulations to Andrea Duarte, who recently received the Distinguished Managerial Service Award, which is given annually to recognize exemplary service and dedication to the State of Connecticut.

Andrea joined the DMHAS team in 2001 and, among her many notable achievements, her work to support mental health and suicide prevention efforts throughout the state stands out. She currently co-chairs the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board (CTSAB), where she works to increase public awareness of suicide within the state and provides prevention leadership and consultation at the community, state and national levels.