



# COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

## Research and News Worth Repeating

*Issue 13, January 22, 2021*

### Telehealth

#### **DeKalb Deploys Mobile Medical Units to Improve Healthcare Access**

*DeKalb Neighbor – December 23, 2020*

DeKalb County, Georgia has launched six mobile medical units with the help of federal CARES Act funds. The two step units allow the DeKalb County Board of Health to expand telehealth services, immunization, and community outreach. The units are equipped with medical equipment and intake and examination rooms. District health director, Dr. S. Elizabeth, suggests the units allow the board to address the current pandemic, as well as underlying chronic health issues in the county leading to an over-representation of minority populations among COVID-19 cases.

[https://www.mdjonline.com/neighbor\\_newspapers/dekalb/dekalb-deploys-mobile-medical-units-to-improve-healthcare-access/article\\_fbb384d6-4559-11eb-9490-4feb5ffc69d.html](https://www.mdjonline.com/neighbor_newspapers/dekalb/dekalb-deploys-mobile-medical-units-to-improve-healthcare-access/article_fbb384d6-4559-11eb-9490-4feb5ffc69d.html)

#### **The Future Of Healthcare Is Mobile**

*Forbes – January 15, 2021*

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the dire need for custom healthcare interventions to address health inequity and improve health outcomes for underserved populations. Although there has been conversation about the need to “meet people where they are,” America has yet to make that adaptation on a broad scale. One answer is to provide mobile primary healthcare beyond the pandemic. Research shows mobile care is cost-friendly and acceptable among vulnerable populations. It also shows mobile healthcare improves health outcomes, reduces avoidable emergency room use and bridges trust between patients and the healthcare system. While in-person healthcare remains a valued and necessary service delivery modality, mobile healthcare is growing in practice and acceptance as a valid option within the over-burdened healthcare system.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisafitzpatrick/2021/01/15/the-future-of-healthcare-is-mobile/?sh=4843fbf01f71>

## **Plans to Divert People Suffering Mental Health Crisis from Jails, ER Evolve in Kent County**

*MLive* – January 21, 2021

Kent County, Michigan is making plans to include mobile crisis response units, a central behavioral call center, and two crisis campuses to treat individuals diverted from jails and emergency rooms. The Kent County Board of Commissioners has given initial approval to a \$255,000 contract for this project. If approved, planning and work are expected to be completed by the end of the year. The county's vision has residents receiving quick and adequate care for mental health crises, regardless of insurance status, and lessening the burden on jail and hospital populations.

<https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2021/01/plans-to-divert-people-suffering-mental-health-crisis-from-jails-er-evolve-in-kent-county.html>

## **Substance Use**

### **New Program Will Provide Bridge to Treatment for Patients with Mental Health and Addiction Needs**

*M Health Fairview* – December 12, 2020

M Health Fairview, the largest provider of mental health services in the upper Midwest, will be opening a new program in St. Paul, Minnesota this month in an effort to bridge the gap between initial care and follow-up treatment for patients in need of mental health or addiction care. The new Transitional Care Services program guarantees that patients will receive support until their treatment begins. As part of this program, patients will receive in-person or virtual care from mental healthcare providers who are able to prescribe needed medication, as well as crisis therapists and peer support staff. In addition, the program provides a variety of services including emergency crisis therapy, medication support, and alcohol and drug abuse support. Transition Care Services also includes the Mobile SUDS program which is a mobile support program that brings alcohol and drug addiction care out to the community.

<https://mhealthfairview.org/blog/new-program-will-provide-bridge-for-mental-health-and-addiction-patients>

## **A Double-Edged Sword of Using Opioids and COVID-19: A Toxicological View**

*Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* – December 3, 2020

Information about COVID-19, its mechanism, prognostic factors, and management has been limited. As a human disease, COVID-19 has several identifying phases. Physicians caring for patients with COVID-19 may be interested in knowing how opioid use disorder affects the course or prognosis of this disease for their patients. When considering the scale of the opioid epidemic in the US and other parts of the world, this information is crucial. Opioid use at high doses and over several months duration can compromise the immune system's function and complicate the course of COVID-19 disease. The potential suppression of the immune system's response may be important in the prevention, clinical support, and therapeutic use of medications during various phases of COVID-19. Specifically, for those with inhalant-based opioid use

disorders, the “late hyper-inflammatory phase” may be enhanced or result in end-organ damage. It is well-established that opioid use decreases ventilation based on the effect on the medullary respiratory centers, resulting in an increased risk of pneumonia. This increased risk has been associated with immune-suppressive opioids. Ultimately, while the role of opioids in COVID-19 treatment remains unclear, this paper emphasizes the need for further clinical studies to decipher the role and impact of chronic opioid use upon viral diseases such as COVID-19.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-020-00333-y>

## **HHS Expands Access to Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder**

*United States Department of Health & Human Services – January 14, 2021*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced its plan to publish [Practice Guidelines for Administration of Buprenorphine for Treating Opioid Use Disorder](#) as part of an effort to broaden the access to medicated-assisted treatment (MAT). The plan exempts physicians from certain certification requirements previously needed to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were more than 83,000 drug overdose deaths in the U.S. from June 2019 to June 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period. This spike in overdose deaths amplifies the need for treatment services to become more accessible for those most at risk of overdose. These HHS guidelines strive to meet this need through access expansion and increased availability for treatment. The change in certification requirements will grant almost all physicians the ability to prescribe buprenorphine for up to 30 patients, regardless of whether they’ve obtained the X waiver.

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/01/14/hhs-expands-access-to-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder.html>

## **Mental Health**

### **Federal Judge: Philly Jails Must Relax Extreme COVID-19 Lockdown Measures for Sake of Mental Health**

*The Philadelphia Inquirer – January 14, 2021*

Since the first threat of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Philadelphia Department of Prisons implemented a strict stay-in-place policy. However, civil rights lawyers argue that this policy unduly limits access to well-circulated air. Consequently, these lawyers have fought for prisoners to receive a minimum of 45 minutes a day out of their cells. Unfortunately, many prisons often failed to do so. An outbreak in mid-December caused the department to enforce an even stricter lockdown allowing only 15 minutes a day outside of their cell. According to documents filed with the court, prisoners report having to choose between a shower or a phone call based on the limited amount of time allowed out of their cell. Some even said there were days without any out-of-cell time at all. In addition, the lockdown also limited access to mental health care for those suffering from depression and anxiety. A federal judge has now ordered the department of prisons to ease the lockdown policy for the sake of prisoners’ mental and physical health.

<https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia/philadelphia-jail-covid-lockdown-out-of-cell-judge-order-20210114.html>

## **Pandemic Relief Bill Delivers \$4.25 Billion for Mental Health Services**

***The Washington Post* – December 21, 2020**

For some time now, mental health advocates have urged the U.S. government to address the issue of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts faced by many Americans. As part of the most recent stimulus package signed into law in December, 2020, Congress designated \$4.25 billion for mental health and substance use disorders. The funding is not exactly what experts have asked for but it is the largest amount that behavioral health groups have received in a single spending bill in recent years. This funding is vital to American citizens, especially during the pandemic. According to the CDC, more people have died of drug overdoses than at any other point in U.S. history. The funding will be allocated to programs such as suicide prevention, mental health services for children returning to school, and community behavioral health clinics. Mental health advocates maintain that while mental health needs will continue for years, the money is a start.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/12/21/mental-health-services-get-billions-relief-bill/>

## **Ever Considered Narcan Training? Now Is the Time to Act**

***Healthline* – January 20, 2021**

Although drug overdose deaths were on the rise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows a monthly uptick since March 2020. The majority of those deaths were linked to fentanyl, which is a major contributor to the ongoing opioid crisis. Experts suggest that access to and training in the use of Naloxone (Narcan), a fast-acting opioid antagonist that can reverse and block the effects of an opioid overdose, is a key tool for preventing overdose deaths. In the wake of this rise in opioid overdose deaths, advocates encourage people to learn how to administer naloxone (Narcan) and help save lives during this pandemic.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/substance-use/naloxone-training-covid#The-bottom-line>