

Health inequities, prevention, and COVID-19's impact on individuals and kids

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We are seeing a significant impact from COVID-19 on Virginians' behavioral health as well as substance use disorder.

- One model predicts an additional 1,720 deaths of despair (deaths due to suicide or overdose), in Virginia alone due to the economic impact of the pandemic. From March through September of 2020, average monthly drug overdoses are 29% higher than 2019. Further, there has been an increase in alcohol and substance use.
- This doesn't account for the countless individuals with increased depression and anxiety (Kaiser Family Foundation predicts 45% of adults have experienced a negative impact on their mental health due to virus).



Many of the people experiencing the behavioral health impacts of COVID-19 are children.

- School closures, social distancing, etc. can have general impact on behavioral health.
- Intensive, school-based services like Therapeutic Day Treatment have been interrupted, forced to pivot.
- Inpatient resources for children in behavioral health crisis have also been limited by the crisis. For example, DBHDS' only state hospital for children, the Commonwealth Center for Children and Adolescents (CCCA) has had to close admissions due to a COVID-19 outbreak and has struggled to maintain staffing during the pandemic.

As we map out interventions and plan our response, we're thinking about inequities in the impact of COVID-19.

- Protests and calls to action over the summer have re-affirmed DBHDS's commitment to addressing health inequities.
- We are continuing work on the Behavioral Health Index in order to equitably dedicate funding to the communities with the highest level of need.
- DBHDS has also hired a Chief Equity Advisor, working on an equity committee, to make sure our internal operations reflect our commitment to addressing inequities.

DBHDS works to ensure behavioral health, substance use disorder, and developmental disability services are available to all Virginians who need them in the most community-oriented, integrated setting possible. More information is available at dbhds.virginia.gov/about-dbhds/policy-and-public-affairs/ga2021