St. Clair County Community Mental Health Authority

Promoting Discovery & Recovery Opportunities for Healthy Minds & Bodies

Debra B. Johnson
Executive Director

Mohammad Saeed, MD
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Board Chairman

Mr. Robert Gordon
Director
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
235 South Grand Avenue
P.O. Box 30037
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Director Gordon,

At moments of crisis such as we are experiencing with the COVID-19 virus outbreak, it is necessary to take an "all hands on deck" approach. As a member of the public mental health system, we at St. Clair County Community Mental Health believe our professional expertise, community-based treatment programs, and well-established positive reputation in the community is as essential to the Blue Water area weathering this challenge as is any hospital or medical professional. With that in mind, we have taken the following steps to provide community support during this crisis:

- Our case managers, clinicians, peer supports and mental health assistants continue to provide support to individuals receiving SCCCMH services via phone and video conference. They continue to ensure individuals receive their medications and other essential services and supports they need to stay healthy and well.

- We are providing medication reviews, injections and other essential services face-to-face on an as-needed basis by prescribers and medical staff.

- Our Mobile Crisis Team continues to provide crisis intervention services on a face-to-face basis as needed.

- Our Assertive Community Treatment Team, which works with individuals requiring on-going intensive support, continues to provide face-to-face services as needed.

- Our access lines remain open and intake appointments also continue via phone.

- We have implemented a COVID-19 Support Line that allows anyone in the community experiencing anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health symptoms resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, to contact us to speak live one-on-one with a mental health professional. On the day this information posted on our Facebook page, it garnered 14,000 impressions

- and was shared 320 times. We also have a "text support" line as well as dedicated email address, Covid19support@scccmh.org, to support those who prefer email.

- We have a daily COVID-19 newsletter for employees, board members, contract agency providers and other key community stakeholders that provides up to date information on our agency's response to the epidemic as well as resources for staff to utilize at home and in the scope of their work day.

- We are conducting weekly calls with our entire prover network in St. Clair County to identify any issues, service gaps, staffing needs; to share information and resources.

- We continue to work with our on-site PCP and pharmacy to ensure quality services are provided continually during this crisis.

- On our Facebook page, we are providing daily updates and information regarding the COVID-19 virus and good mental health during times of crisis. This includes healthy home-based activities, exercise and nutrition videos from our InShape staff, helpful information for families such as dealing with anxiety and how to help kids cope, and links to support services and resources.

- On our web page, we have a dedicated page with links to COVID-19 information and resources.

- In cooperation with the Times Herald, our local newspaper, we are publishing weekly articles related to the COVID-19 virus and good mental health.

- In cooperation with EBW-TV, a local internet news provider, we are providing up-to-date information on COVID-19 and good mental health.

- We are supporting our first responders, medical professionals, and other essential employers through the St. Clair County Critical Incident Stress Management team. This team provides professional interventions whenever there is a critical incident, including a prolonged event such as the COVID-19 outbreak.

- We are an active member representing mental health services on the St. Clair County Office of Emergency Management, which includes having a dedicated staff assigned there to coordinate our COVID-19 efforts with other public and private county agencies.

- Through our Community Services Coordinating Body, working in conjunction with the St. Clair County Emergency Operation Center, we continue to assist in the coordination of information and assistance throughout the county.

- In response to the CDC's new recommendation on mask use in public, we have implemented an agency-wide mask policy where everyone, including staff and visitors must use a mask when in any of our facilities. Due to the generous support of our staff

and volunteers, we have had the resources to provide reusable fabric masks to anyone who need them.

I am confident that our efforts are mirrored throughout the state by other community mental health organizations. As we move forward with the necessary task of improving Michigan's behavioral health system, it is important to ensure that the resulting system, during a similar crisis is able to provide the same level of uninterrupted services and community support. During national emergencies, the COVID-19 crisis, it has never been more apparent the vital importance of having CMHs like ours equipped with the resources and capacity to function as the public safety net.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Best regards,

Debra Johnson
Executive Director
St. Clair County Community Mental Health

Cc: St. Clair County Community Mental Health Board of Directors
Allen Jansen, Senior Deputy Director, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration
Jim Johnson, Executive Director, Region 10 Prepaid Inpatient Health Plan
Robert Sheehan, CEO, Community Mental Health Association of Michigan

COVID-19 SUPPORT LINE

St. Clair County Community Mental Health has a COVID-19 Support Line, with phone, text and e-mail options, available Monday through Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm. The Support Line is staffed by mental health professionals who can:

- Provide support for people who are struggling with feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Provide support for people who are dealing with panic or anxiety over the possibility of getting sick, financial struggle, resource scarcity, or caregiving
- Provide support for first responders, essential employees, medical professionals on the front lines of the Coronavirus situation and struggling with burnout, anxiety, depression and feeling overwhelmed
- Provide support for people who are sick at home, or caring for a sick family member and dealing with fear, anxiety, depression and feeling overwhelmed
- Support anyone who could use someone to talk to during this difficult time

* The COVID-19 Support Line is available to anyone in St. Clair County, you do not need to be using CMH services, or have a mental health diagnosis of any kind. The Support Line should not be used for crisis calls or medical emergencies. The COVID-19 Support Line is not meant to take the place of therapy/counseling or to treat or diagnosis any physical or mental health condition. If the mental health professional determines that the issue is more severe than the COVID-19 Support Line can manage, they will refer people to appropriate resources. If you leave a message and get a call or text back from the COVID-19 Support Line, it may come through as a blocked caller.

To Access SCCCMH Services, or for by-phone crisis intervention, call the Region 10 Access Line at (888) 225-4447. For in-person crisis intervention, call the Mobile Crisis Unit at (810) 966-2575. Both lines can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

E-mail: covid19support@scccmh.org

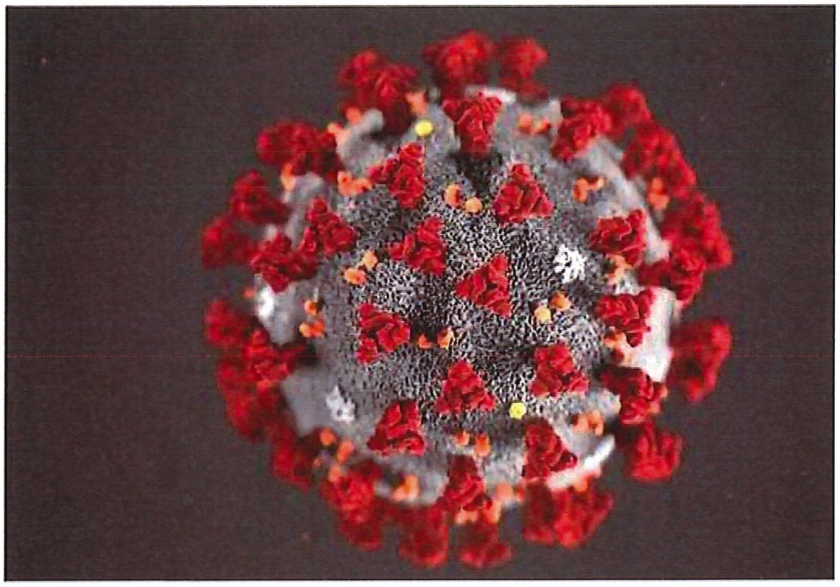
Call: (810) 985-8900

Text: (810) 956-6335

St. Clair County Community Mental Health
Promoting Discovery & Recovery Opportunities for Healthy Minds & Bodies

Struggling with COVID-19 stress? St. Clair, Sanilac CMH agencies launched helplines.

Jackie Smith, Port Huron Times Herald Published 4:29 p.m. ET April 3, 2020 | **Updated 4:00 p.m. ET April 6, 2020**



An illustration image of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. *(Photo: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)*

Residents in both St. Clair and Sanilac counties now have access to Community Mental Health COVID-19 support lines if they're struggling with anxiety or feeling overwhelmed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Deb Johnson, St. Clair County CMH's executive director, said the agency began with a soft launch early last week, making a clinician available over the phone before adding text and email options.

"It's for anybody and it doesn't have to be a long conversation," Johnson said. "But if anyone is feeling lonely or isolated, want some tips to manage the stress of the situation, this is a great resource and it's free."

Sanilac County announced the launch of a mental health helpline on Monday.

Sanilac CMH Chief Clinical Officer Nicole Beagle said in a Facebook video that the county's line was also confidential for callers who needed tools and resources to cope or wanted "just to connect with somebody."

"I think it's safe to say that everyone's starting to feel that pressure, just starting to feel overwhelmed with the whole quarantine process and the information that comes out daily on COVID-19," Beagle said in the video "So, here at Sanilac County CMH, we wanted to make sure our community members have as many resources, tools and (are) provided with as much education as possible to help protect their mental health during this pandemic."

The St. Clair County Health Department already has a regular information line for questions about the coronavirus, and Johnson said CMH had been asked to send a masters-level clinician to the county's emergency operations center.

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sherrle@scccmh.org →

"But they were getting a lot of callers just stressed out about the situation," she said. So, with other clinicians working from home who could answer questions anywhere, she said they decided to develop a line of their own.

Johnson said the support line was geared toward individuals who are age 14 and older. If personnel suspect they're speaking with a younger youth, she said they'd likely ask to speak with a parent.

On Thursday, the CMH official estimated they'd likely had roughly 15 to 20 people call in amid the support line's slow unveil and before the added text and email options were more advertised.

A support line 'regular folks could call if needed'

Johnson said on Wednesday, that officials heard from an older woman who called the new support line after she'd gotten a flyer passed out by the mother of a CMH employee.

"'I really am struggling,'" she said, recalling the woman's comment. "… This is a woman with no previous medical health concerns."

The feedback from the exchange was positive, Johnson said, and a good example that "regular folks could call if needed."

Although calls were confidential, Johnson said CMH staff providing the service are tracking data.

Deb Johnson

It wasn't clear yet what the demand would be for the service, but she said they knew it'd be a need.

"We'll have as many people as we need assigned to it," Johnson said. "Right now, we have one clinician answering the line, one with (a) cell phone to text and two with access (to the email). But as the demand increases, we have the ability to add more masters-level clinicians."

She added that if clinicians interact with someone who "has some real serious anxiety that needs to be addressed more than just hat phone call," CMH's mobile crisis unit and regular access line were still available through 24/seven phone numbers.

How to learn more

In addition to information coming out of the county's EOC, Johnson referred people to St. Clair County Community Mental Health's Facebook page, where she said they try to post resources more specifically about stress and anxiety.

Overall, Johnson said there were simple rules to follow at home to help — what you can control and what you can't.

"What you can control is your attitude and how much you watch the news," she said. "More than 30 minutes of news on the coronavirus, it's not good for you."

Johnson also pointed to things like nutrition and exercise to cope, adding, "Nothing says you can't get outside. Just keep your distance. … Go outside, get some vitamin D."

St. Clair County CMH's COVID-19 support line is available by calling (810) 985-8900, via text at (810) 956-6335 or emailing covid19support@scccmh.org from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

More general or technical questions about the coronavirus can also be answered via St. Clair County's COVID-19 informational hotline at (810) 966-4163 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays and through email at covid19@stclaircounty.org.

Sanilac CMH's helpline could be reached at (810) 648-0330 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The county's after-hours crisis line was (888) 225-4447.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services as a hotline available between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. seven days a week at 1 (888) 535-6136.

Jackie Smith is the local government reporter for the Times Herald. Have questions or a story idea? Contact her at (810) 989-6270 or jssmith@gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter @Jackie20Smith

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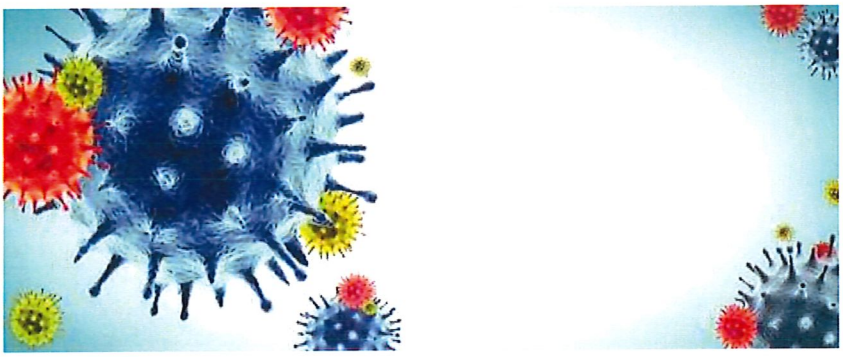
OPINION

Staying focused and healthy during the COVID-19 crisis

Debra B. Johnson and Dr. Annette Mercatante, Guest columnists Published 11:52 a.m. ET April 6, 2020 | **Updated 11:52 a.m. ET April 6, 2020**



The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. *(Photo: USA Today Network, USA Today Network)*

On March 1, the national number of reported COVID-19 cases was only 70. Since then, the virus has spread throughout the country, with more than 24 states reporting more than 1,000 cases. As of this writing, Michigan is reporting over 15,000 confirmed cases with more than 600 deaths. While the current epicenters are New York and New Jersey, Michigan has the third largest number of reported cases in the United States.

Despite the enormous increase in reported cases in March, some people look at the total current rate of infection and consider it insignificant in a nation of 330 million people. This is a dangerous and misguided point of view. The task force overseeing the White House's response to COVID-19 projects a final death toll of between 100,000 and 240,000, depending on how well countermeasures are implemented. Unfortunately, regardless of what we do now, it is clear that many more people will be infected by the virus and become symptomatic, requiring medical attention. Because of the two-week incubation period during which an individual may not display symptoms, the possibility of someone unknowingly infecting others is high. There is increasing evidence that people can transmit the virus with no symptoms. This is especially true given that 80% of people who contract COVID-19 will experience only mild to moderate symptoms.

Deb Johnson

Controlling the rate of infection is the key to ensuring we have enough hospital beds, medical personnel, ventilators, and personal protective equipment (PPE), to provide useful medical care to the afflicted. This is why Governor Whitmer's shelter in place order, practicing social distancing, washing our hands regularly for 20 seconds or more, and practicing good disinfection routines at home and work, are so important. Most of us are not in a position to directly affect the care of those with COVID-19, but all of us can contribute to slowing its spread, thereby helping ensure the limited resources we have are sufficient to provide care to everyone who needs it.

A surge in the number of individuals requiring hospitalization for COVID-19 is already occurring in other parts of the country and state, and will soon reach St. Clair County. Together, we need to prevent our local hospitals from being flooded with patients.

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To date, the St. Clair County Emergency Operations Center has received a few shipments from the Strategic National Stockpile containing a limited amount of PPE. This PPE has either been distributed, or is in the process of distribution, and is being prioritized for those most at risk of infection including local hospitals and first responders.

As necessary as the social distancing measures are, it is clear that for some they create anxiety and stress. We worry not only for ourselves, but for our family and friends. This is natural but it is important not to let this anxiety and stress overwhelm you. Stay informed about COVID-19, so you have a clear picture of the real concerns posed by the virus, but don't succumb to the temptation of worst-case scenarios.

Avoid allowing yourself and your family to drift day-after-day in a kind of perpetual weekend. Instead, aim for structure by following a schedule with lots of activities. Follow all the recommendations for slowing the spread of the virus. This is extremely important!

Buy Photo

Dr. Annette Mercatante, medical health officer for the St. Clair County Health Department, photographed in her office Wednesday, March 11, 2020, at the St. Clair County Health Department in Port Huron. *(Photo: Brian Wells/Times Herald)*

If you, a family member, or a friend are experiencing anxiety, stress, depression, or other mental health symptoms as a result of concern over COVID-19, St. Clair County Community Mental Health has a COVID-19 Support Line. Call 1-810-985-8900 and you will be connected to a mental health professional. There is also a texting option available at 810-956-6335 and an email option at Covid19support@scccmh.org. For questions related to COVID-19 testing or symptoms, call the St. Clair County COVID-19 Information Hotline at 810-966-4163. All of these resources are available at no charge.

It has never been more clear than during the present crisis how dependent we are as a community on the sacrifices of our first responders, hospital staff, mental health professionals, front line staff and others who everyday put themselves at risk to ensure our community's health and safety. We owe all of them a HUGE "thank you." As a community, if we show a fraction of their care, concern, and conscientiousness, we will successfully weather the COVID-19 crisis.

Debra B. Johnson is the executive director of St. Clair County Community Mental Health.

Dr. Annette Mercatante is the medical health officer of St. Clair County Health Department.

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