



DMHAS Update

April 2023

Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta

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April is Alcohol Awareness Month, which is a good time to reflect on our drinking patterns and the role that alcohol plays in our lives. Most adults in the United States who drink alcohol drink moderately and without complications. However, Alcohol Use Disorder affects about 29 million adults in the United States, and an estimated 140,000 people die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the nation. Across all active clients in DMHAS-funded and operated treatment related (substance use and mental health) programs, alcohol was the most frequently reported primary drug (34%) at the time of admission. Read on for more on how our Prevention and Health Promotion Team helped support Alcohol Awareness and other local events and community initiatives, as well as much more. As always, thanks for reading and please feel free to get in touch with your ideas and feedback.



Roundtable Discussion in Willimantic



Commissioner Navarretta and Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz recently co-moderated a roundtable discussion in Willimantic regarding statewide efforts to prevent fatal overdoses. The panel included Congressman Joe Courtney, State Rep. Susan Johnson, Windham Mayor Tom DeVivo, DPH Deputy Commissioner Jody Terranova, CCAR Director of Recovery Advocacy Rebecca Allen, Windham Recovery Community Center Manager John Schwartz, CCAR Emergency Department Program Manager Kevin Shuler, and CCAR Emergency Department Recovery Coach Will Rowsam.

LGBTQIA+ Collaborative Observes Sexual Assault Awareness Month

This month marks the 22nd anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The theme of Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2023 is “Drawing Connections: Prevention Demands Equity.” The campaign calls on all individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions to change ourselves and the systems surrounding us to build racial equity and respect.

The [Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#) believes that LGBTQIA+ people face systemic and historical oppression and experience additional barriers when seeking services. Sexual violence happens in all communities, however, we know that marginalized communities disproportionately experience sexual violence and have less access to interventions when they are victimized. In addition, some LGBTQIA+ individuals experience additional oppression and marginalization through other aspects of their identity. As various forms of inequality and oppression often interact and exacerbate each other, it is essential that those who advocate for and serve LGBTQIA+ survivors of sexual violence are aware of the intersectionality of structural inequality and systemic oppression, and its impact on the lives of LGBTQIA+ people. Advocates may need to do extra work to build trust with survivors and to ensure that they are providing culturally relevant and accessible services through an intersectional lens.

It is important to pay attention to materials, language, and level of comfort in serving LGBTQIA+ people at all levels. Language can be used in a way that is either validating or harmful to LGBTQIA+ people. Learning to use respectful and validating language is a constant process because language is always evolving and changing. While new terms are continually being added, old terms are becoming outdated and disfavored, and previously offensive terms have been reclaimed. One of the most important steps advocates can take to support LGBTQIA+ survivors is to not use heterosexist language and to be mindful about pronouns. It is critical to not make assumptions about someone’s identity, as well as to always mirror the language of the survivor. Everyone deserves the dignity of being referred to by their proper name and pronouns.

The epidemic of sexual violence in the LGBTQIA+ community is something we must all work together to address. If someone discloses to you that they have been sexually assaulted, remember to believe them, reassure them that it wasn’t their fault, keep their disclosure confidential (unless the situation requires mandatory reporting), and never pressure them for more information than they want to share.

For LGBTQIA+ information and resources visit: the [DMHAS LGBTQ Services page](#).



CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Opportunities for Prevention and Action

- ⇒ The promotion of respectful, nonviolent relationships is key to preventing violence.
- ⇒ Services and support systems that address the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ community
- ⇒ Implementing prevention approaches that promote acceptance and recognition of healthy, respectful relationships regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ⇒ Including the LGBTQIA+ community in national, state, and local violence research.
- ⇒ Referring victims and survivors to culturally appropriate accessible services.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Since 1987, this public health observance has been organized by the [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence \(NCADD\)](#) as a way to educate the public regarding the dangers of alcohol misuse – including underage and binge drinking.

According to the 2021 [National Survey on Drug Use and Health \(NSDUH\)](#), among people aged 12 or older, 47.5% (or 133.1 million people) drank alcohol in the past 30 days and 45.1% (or 60 million people) were past month binge drinkers. This is a decrease from the inception of this survey; however, there is still work to be done.

In an effort to reduce those statistics, many [Local Prevention Councils](#) and colleges/universities organized events and activities to educate Connecticut residents on the dangers of underage alcohol use and binge drinking. [Prevention and Health Promotion Division \(PHP\)](#) staff attended local events as part of the Prevention in Connecticut Communities (PCC) grant site visits including:

- The [Windham Pride Coalition](#) held a Prevention Day, in collaboration with the [Eastern Connecticut State University \(ECSU\) Office of Wellness Education and Promotion](#). ECSU students stopped by tables in the student center to try on beer goggles to see if they could walk a straight line, tested their knowledge on alcohol facts, and scanned QR codes for electronic resource packets.
- The [Developing Positive Youth Culture \(DPYC\) Coalition](#) in Ellington organized a park clean-up for Earth Day where volunteers gathered to remove trash including cigarettes, empty beer bottles, empty vape cartridges and other litter. The coalition showed how substance use also has a negative impact on the environment (pictures below).

To build upon successful programs and continue this important work, DMHAS PHP was awarded the [Strategic Prevention Framework - Partnerships for Success \(PFS\) grant](#) from SAMHSA where underage drinking prevention programs will be expanded to twelve communities targeting 12 – 17 year olds. This \$6.25 million dollar award continues through 2027.

For more information on grant initiatives, please contact Stephanie Welch: Stephanie.Welch@ct.gov



Coping with Stress

Learning to cope with stress and finding healthy ways to deal with it can go a long way towards living a healthy and positive life. **Stress Awareness Month** has been recognized every April since 1992, but this year it seems particularly important to be mindful of the impacts of stress on our lives. Stress can cause physical, emotional and behavioral disorders which can affect your health as well as personal and professional relationships. Too much stress can cause relatively minor illnesses like insomnia, backaches, or headaches, and can contribute to potentially life-threatening diseases like high blood pressure and heart disease.

Here are some basic tips for coping with stress:

Self care: Eat healthy, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, take a break if you feel stressed.

Talk it out: Share how you are feeling and coping with a family member, friend, doctor, pastor or counselor.

Avoid drugs and alcohol: These can create additional problems and increase the stress you are already feeling.

Recognize when you need more help: Talk to a psychologist, social worker or counselor if things continue.

Take this [free stress screener](#) from Mental Health America to see if stress is adversely impacting you.

2023 Annual CIT Statewide Conference

Commissioner Navarretta recently had the honor of providing welcoming remarks at the 2023 [Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement \(CABLE\)](#) Annual Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Statewide Conference. CABLE has provided training for law enforcement personnel in the State of Connecticut for more than 20 years. The CIT Training follows best practices set forth by CIT International and follows the [Memphis Model](#). To date, CABLE has provided over 100 CIT trainings, which were attended by over 5,000 people (state, municipal, hospital, and university police officers, mental health professionals, correctional officers, probation officers, and EMS).

96% of municipal police departments now have CIT-trained officers and 65 police departments have CIT policies. When encountering people in emotional distress, clinicians from our mobile crisis teams bring a unique skill set that helps to slow things down, center the individual in crisis, and decrease the anxiety of the situation. By working to de-escalate tense situations, we can better address what is at the root of the issue and help that person get the immediate and appropriate support that they need. This can help avoid a trip to the emergency room or hospitalization, and often results in linkage to one of the myriad of services that DMHAS and its community partners provide.

Congratulations to DMHAS River Valley Services CIT Clinician Kristin Sorlie on receiving the Mobile Crisis/CIT Clinician of the Year Award at the conference!

