

DMHAS UPDATE

Winter 2025

A Message from the Commissioner

Dear Team,

The start of this year has already brought important progress in our work, and I am proud of what we are accomplishing together. No matter the season, your unwavering commitment ensures that individuals across Connecticut receive the care and support they need. Your dedication and compassion are the driving forces behind our progress, and I am grateful for the work you do each day to strengthen our behavioral health system.

As we continue our work, we remain committed to building a strong and capable workforce that reflects the broad range of experiences and perspectives needed to serve our communities effectively. By upholding the values of dignity, respect, and fairness, we strive to ensure that everyone can contribute to our mission and make a meaningful impact.

Together, we will continue building a future where high-quality mental health and substance use services are available to all who need them. Wishing you warmth and wellness as we finish out the winter season.



Highlights:

- Statewide Partnerships
- Substance Use Disorder Treatment Month
- Black History Month
- YAS BIZ Artwork at OOC
- GBCMHC Garage
- Division and Program Updates
- Internal Interview Coaching

- Nancy

Statewide Partnerships

Historic Settlement Secures Billions for Opioid Recovery



Commissioner Navarretta joined the Attorney General, Ridgefield First Selectman Rudy Marconi, former Waterbury Mayor Neil O'Leary, and families impacted by the opioid crisis to announce a historic \$7.4 billion settlement against Purdue Pharma and the Sackler family. The settlement will fund opioid treatment and recovery services, addressing the epidemic's devastating impact and holding those responsible accountable.

OSAC Approves \$58.6M for Housing and Recovery Initiative for People Experiencing Homelessness and Opioid Use Disorder

Commissioner Navarretta joined Governor Lamont, Attorney General Tong, DOH Commissioner Mosquera-Bruno, State Rep. McCarthy Vahey, and Mercy Housing CEO Kara Capone to announce \$58.6M in opioid settlement funding for housing and recovery support for individuals facing homelessness and opioid use disorder.



State Leaders Unite to Protect Youth from Vaping Risks



DMHAS recently partnered with the Attorney General and other state leaders to tackle the harmful impact of illicit e-cigarettes that target youth. Protecting the health and well-being of Connecticut's young people requires a collaborative effort, and this initiative is an important step in addressing the risks associated with unregulated vaping products.

Winter Observances

DMHAS Joins National Effort for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Month

In January, DMHAS joined the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in recognizing the first national Substance Use Disorder Treatment Month, a campaign dedicated to raising awareness about the effectiveness of treatment and the resources available for individuals on the path to recovery.

As part of this effort, DMHAS helped spread awareness by sharing information and resources across its networks, reinforcing the message that treatment works and recovery is possible. Messaging focused on encouraging individuals to seek help and highlighting the availability of evidence-based treatment options.

January is a time when many people focus on new beginnings, making it the perfect opportunity to emphasize that help is available. Together, recovery is possible.



DMHAS Celebrates Black History Month



Throughout February, the DMHAS OMHE Multicultural Committee honored Black History Month by sharing educational messages on influential Black historical figures. The celebration culminated in a special luncheon with an opening presentation by Leonard Epps,

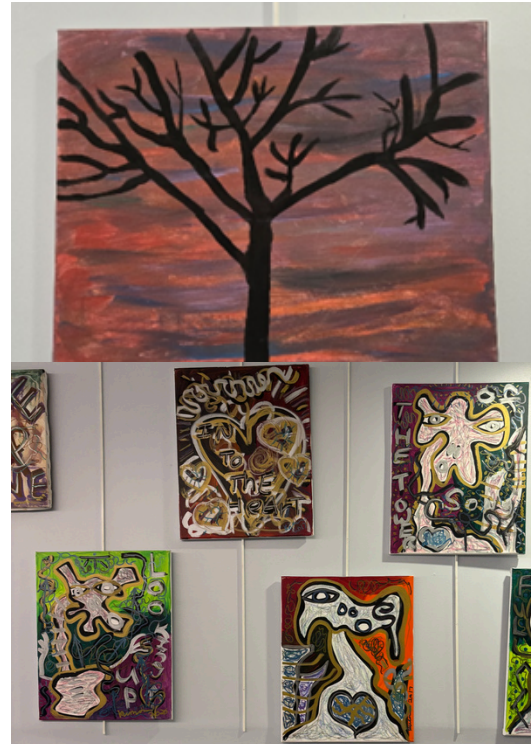
welcome remarks from Commissioner Navarretta and OMHE Director Samia Hussein, and a keynote address from Windsor Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke, bringing staff together to reflect on Black history, leadership, and contributions to our communities.

Inspiration & Infrastructure

YAS BIZ Artwork on Display at OOC

Young Adult Services (YAS) and Street Smart Ventures proudly showcased YAS BIZ artwork at the Recovery Gallery In Motion and the Office of the Commissioner this holiday season. Among the featured artists was Frank U from WCMHN-TA, who generously donated their work to the Office of Recovery Community Affairs (ORCA).

This display highlights the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of YAS BIZ participants, made possible with the support of Elsa Ward and the many mentors, peers, and art enthusiasts who champion their work. We hope this opportunity sparks inspiration and pride for all who visit!



GBCMHC Completes Garage Project to Better Serve Community Needs



The much anticipated garage repair and expansion project at Greater Bridgeport Community Mental Health Center (GBCMHC) is now complete. This new garage improves accessibility and convenience for staff and visitors, providing much-needed parking space to support the center's vital services. The project marks a significant investment in the infrastructure of GBCMHC, ensuring a more accommodating and efficient environment for all.

Integrated Care Workgroup Hosts Expert-Led Stages of Change Training for Staff

The DMHAS Integrated Care Workgroup hosted three free training sessions on the Stages of Change (Transtheoretical Model), led by Dr. Carlo DiClemente, co-developer of the model. The virtual kickoff on December 4, 2024, drew 160 attendees. On January 8, 80 people attended an in-person full-day session at the Connecticut Women's Consortium in Hamden, followed by a two-part virtual training on January 22 and 30, each with over 80 participants.

These invaluable sessions reinforced DMHAS's commitment to integrated care, ensuring mental health and substance use needs are addressed within a culturally appropriate framework.

A special thank you to all DMHAS state facility staff who attended!



Mindmap Featured on NBC's "CT Live"

On December 10th John Leuba, LCSW, Clinical Director at Southeastern Mental Health Authority (SMHA), Amy Marracino, LCSW, Section Chief, Young Adult Services Office of the Commissioner, and Laura Yoviene Sykes, Ph.D., Director of Specialized Treatment Early in Psychosis (STEP) Learning Collaborative were guests on NBC "CT Live" to do a feature on Mindmap, a public awareness campaign that promotes the early detection and treatment of psychosis for teens and young adults in Connecticut ages 16-35. Mindmap is part of a Statewide Effort to Connect Young Adults to Early Psychosis Care. Over the course of the interview important information was



discussed, including some of the common signs and symptoms of psychosis, what treatment can look like, along with how people can get in touch with Early Detection and Assessment Coordinator (EDAC).

Division Updates:

Young Adult Services

Affinity Esports Young Adult Program: Building Community & Healthier Habits Through Gaming

In 2024, the Affinity Esports Young Adult Program engaged 120 participants across 10 sites, delivering 16 impactful sessions. Thanks to the collaboration with DMHAS YAS Leadership and 14 individual programs, we fostered balance, mental well-being, and meaningful social connections in a supportive environment for personal growth and community building. A new studio was launched in Milford, CT to add to the Newtown studio. We

continue to offer mobile programs to YAS sites that cannot manage the drive to Newtown or Milford.

Here are links to a [teaser video](#) and a [full-length video](#) for the Young Adult Gaming Club.

For any questions or assistance, contact the team at (203) 290-1656.



Young Adults Rise to the Challenge at Leadership Summit

On Friday, January 31st, Advocacy Unlimited's Join Rise Be program hosted its annual Young Adult Leadership Summit for YAS. The summit brought



together 77 young adults from across the state, providing an opportunity to connect, develop leadership skills, and share lived experiences. As a peer-run initiative, Join Rise Be empowers young adults in recovery to use their voices to inspire change, foster resilience, and support one another. The event featured interactive sessions, creative activities, and discussions focused on personal growth and advocacy.

Division Updates:

Problem Gambling Services Housing and Homeless Services

PGS Prepares for Problem Gambling Awareness Month

DMHAS Problem Gambling Services is preparing for Problem Gambling Awareness Month this March, a nationwide campaign to raise awareness and promote prevention, treatment, and recovery. The month aims to educate the public, highlight available resources, and encourage healthcare providers to screen for problem gambling. Our professionals will expand awareness statewide through training, community events, screenings, and social media. MCCA's Responsible Play Gambling Awareness Resource Van will travel across Connecticut - check their calendar for locations. The van is also available year-round for events and trainings.



Empowering Outreach: DMHAS Trains New Homeless Outreach Teams



During Connecticut's coldest months, DMHAS homeless outreach teams work tirelessly to support those living outside. In October 2024, DMHAS Housing and Homeless Services hosted an in-person training for new federally funded outreach teams, covering engagement best practices, safety, self-care, vicarious trauma, and Naloxone training. Attendees also received

resources from Problem Gambling Services and Women's Services to support specialty populations. To aid harm reduction, 80 boxes of Naloxone (960 doses) were distributed. The training brought together 38 staff from 18 agencies for a day of learning, collaboration, and networking.

Healing Paws:

Continuum of Care's New Pet Therapy and Foster Program

Continuum of Care has created a new program with pets, providing a foster placement for pets in the community, skill building, and companionship for our residents. Continuum partners with Zen Dog CT in Guilford. Their mission is to save stray, abandoned, shelter, and owner surrender dogs of all breeds and ages by placing them in qualified, caring, lifelong homes. The dogs chosen for pet therapy are fostered by us and appropriately trained for pet therapy.

Residents who are part of the program are able to create a schedule to have the dog stay with them a couple nights a week at their home. The residents complete an orientation, sign a contract, and complete training with the dogs to learn how to handle them correctly. Once they have learned the skills needed, they will begin the next step of providing pet therapy session to other programs within the agency who would benefit from pet therapy.

So far, we have three dogs who are currently fostered by staff and four residents who are enrolled in the program. One resident and their dog completed their initial training and graduated from the Good Citizen program. They will begin providing pet therapy session at our main office next month with one of our Clinical Directors.

All residents involved are provided the opportunity for training, supervision, and are involved in the adoption process for the dogs who they help foster through the program. Our hope is to be able to provide a stipend for each resident who provides a pet therapy session to another program and build a bigger program to involve more residents to become pet handlers.



We've seen astounding results with Pet Therapy at Continuum. Thanks to Pet therapy, our client Mike has a sense of calm, focus, and purpose.