



**National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging  
Meeting Minutes  
May 7, 2020**

**Welcome, Agenda Review, Approve Minutes**

Joel E. Miller, NCMHA Chair and American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) Representative, called the virtual meeting to order. He welcomed the 26 members joining meeting on Zoom, necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic. He thanked all of the members for their efforts and the mental health services carried out by their organizations during this difficult time. He reviewed the agenda and asked for action on the minutes. Karen Orsi, representative of the Oklahoma Older Adult Mental Health and Aging Coalition moved acceptance of the February 6, 2020 minutes; Jake Jackson, representing the National Board of Certified Counselors and Affiliates seconded the motion; the minutes were approved as circulated.

**Update on NCMHA Webinar Series, Survey Project and Older Adult Mental Health Day Activities.**

Joel E. Miller, NCMHA Chair asked Kathy Cameron, NCMHA Vice-Chair and National Council on Aging (NCOA) Representative to report on the NCMHA webinar series. Kathy said that during the period July 2019 – March 2020, NCMHA co-sponsored a series of webinars on older adult mental and behavioral health with NCOA and the Administration for Community Living (ACL) of the Department of Health and Human Services. NCOA conducted the webinars that had as many as 1400 registrants per webinar and 700 attendees. All registrants received PowerPoint presentations. The recorded webinars can be accessed at [ncoa.org](http://ncoa.org) Center for Healthy Living. The co-sponsors consider the series a success with the high attendance and excellent content offered by experts from across the country. The next webinar is scheduled for May 20, 2020; 886 individuals/offices have already registered. This webinar will focus on social isolation and will be conducted with the Coalition on Social Isolation and Loneliness.

Joel indicated that future webinars will be developed with the current pandemic situation in mind. They will include focus on opioid use for pain, Covid-19, and, how to provide mental health and substance misuse services in various settings.

Joel Miller and Kathy Cameron are revising the NCMHA members' interests' survey instrument which will be sent to members soon offering plenty of time to respond. Member responses will inform and update of the Coalition's strategic plan.

Joel noted the Older Adult Mental Health Day Activities would commence virtually at 1pm the same day as the Coalition meeting, May 7, 2020 He encouraged all to join the session.

### **Mental Health Response in New York City during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Kathy Cameron introduced Kim Williams, President and CEO of Vibrant Emotional Health New York, NY, and past-chair of the NCMHA Coalition. In response to a question, Kim first reported on her situation indicating that sheltering-in-place in New York City for the past eight weeks has been a challenge but that her family is managing.

The demand for mental health services is increasing dramatically and Kim expects it to continue to increase as the pandemic goes on. New York City did not have a mental health service system ready to respond to the surge in demand. Over the last two months, working with the Coalition for Behavioral Health in New York City, Kim's organization, Vibrant Emotional Health and other providers have organized to deliver telehealth services. While this is working for many clients, other clients need face-to-face interaction with counselors at program sites and in their homes. Vibrant is delivering both telehealth and in person services. New York agencies report a 75% increase in demand from existing clients and a 40+% increase for alternative services. There are not many agencies serving the mental health needs older adults in the City, Vibrant uses the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model with a special older adult focus.

The pandemic has been a real challenge to clients, agencies and the workforce with a number contracting Covid-19 and a few dying. Kim reported that a client recently said that "her weekly Zoom services helps her keep her anxiety in check". Although a number of older adult service agencies in the City have shut down, they are reaching out by phone to help older clients. Vibrant Emotional Health operates the "front door" to behavioral health services for people of all ages with 24/7 phone line and text service. Volume has increased 30%; staff are responding 100% virtually, sometimes needing to use their own equipment. Training needs to be offered after regular work hours. The agency is using more volunteers.

Kim emphasized that New York state has a real commitment to mental health. State and local agency staff are showing incredible dedication and their leaders are supporting them.

Michael O'Donnell of the Illinois Coalition on Older Adult Mental Health and Aging asked about connecting with clients who do not have equipment for virtual services. Kim said that their agency supplies needed equipment. Michael asked whether Medicare plans to cover phone service in addition to the on-line service now covered. Lori Thomas said that on April 30, 2020 CMS announced Medicare is covering both phone and on-line virtual services and that she will post a link to this notice.

Kim noted that her agency primarily serves people with Medicaid coverage and that initially Medicaid covered only on-line virtual service but agencies pushed back and the state quickly agreed to cover services delivered by phone. Joel indicated that CMS had recently approved a number of Medicaid waivers and that he thinks most states are now covering both phone and on-line telehealth.

Kathy noted that New York City has ramped up home meal delivery since congregate sites had to be closed. Kim noted that mental health education offered in senior centers for years had just ended and that she is working with New York Connects to insure that mental health and other support services are made available.

## **COVID-19 Economic Stimulus Response Packages and Impact on Mental Health Services**

Joel E. Miller, NCMHA Chair, offered an extensive PowerPoint presentation summarizing key points for Coalition members. The PowerPoint was sent to members along with the meeting agenda; and an updated PowerPoint was sent to members following this meeting. Joel said that members are free to use his slides and presentation.

Summary of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Packages:

- On March 6, a total of \$8.3 billion was first established when the **Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act 2020** became law.
- A total of \$3.4 billion was released when the **Families First Coronavirus Response Act** was signed into law on March 18.
- The **CARES Act**—signed on March 27—provides \$2 trillion in funding emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic.
- **Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act** – signed on April 24 – provides \$484 billion in additional small business loans and health care supplies.

Joel discussed each of these packages highlighting items of special interest to mental and behavioral health and people served by Coalition member organizations.

**Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act 2020** appropriated \$8.3 billion, largely for emergency health and medical supplies/equipment. The majority (\$6.2 billion) was for **HHS** including: \$3.4 billion for the **Office of the Secretary – Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF)**, which includes more than \$2 billion for the research and development of vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics. The bill also included a waiver removing restrictions on Medicare providers allowing them to offer **telehealth services** to beneficiaries regardless of whether the beneficiary is in a rural community, at an estimated cost of \$500 million.

**Families First Coronavirus Response Act** provides states a share of \$1 billion in unemployment insurance administrative funding. The Act includes *Coverage for covid-19 Testing requiring health insurance issuers offering group or individual health insurance coverage to provide coverage & not impose any cost sharing* for covid-19 testing and related health care provider office visits, urgent care center visits, and emergency room visits.

The **CARES Act** totaled over \$2 trillion. The package included funding and various provisions focused on expanding mental health services including: **SAMHSA** - \$425 million to address mental health and substance use disorders as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics** received \$250 million to increase access to mental health services. The Act provides an extension and the 2-State Expansion of CCBHCs of current demonstration. It also calls for an expansion of demonstration to 2 additional states. CARES Act includes: **Suicide Prevention** - \$50 million to provide increased support for those most in need of intervention; **SAMHSA Emergency Response Grants** - \$100 million in flexible funding to address mental health, substance use disorders, and provide resources and support to youth and the homeless during the pandemic. The Act also modified **Confidentiality and Disclosure of SUD Records and provided Guidance on Protected Health Information** - records may now be shared with prior written consent... it is permissible for patient consent to be given once for all future uses for treatment, payment and health care operations.

**CARES Act further provides \$945 million for NIH for research to develop a better understanding of the prevalence of covid-19 and its transmission, and support novel approaches to diagnosing the disease and develop countermeasures for prevention & treatment. CARES calls for \$15.5 billion for SNAP toward food security. CARES has \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund to help state and local governments cover expenditures related to covid-19 with each state to receive at least \$1.25 billion and \$45 billion Disaster Relief Fund will provide for the immediate needs of state, local, tribal and territorial governments to protect citizens and help them recover from the overwhelming effects of covid-19. The Act has \$100 billion for Public Health & Social Services Emergency Fund providing direct aid to health care institutions dealing with the front line of the crisis. The ACT aids Health Extenders including expansion of Medicare Telehealth. CARES Act also offers extensive aid to small businesses and to individuals through the Unemployment Assistance and Compensation.**

The **Economic Stimulus Package 3.5** signed into law April 24, 2020 focuses on small business and hospitals. The package includes **New Health and Human Services (HHS) Funding:** \$75 billion for reimbursement to hospitals and health care providers to support the need for covid-19 related expenses and lost revenue (this funding is in addition to the \$100 billion provided in the CARES Act); \$25 billion for necessary expenses to research, develop, validate, manufacture, purchase, administer, and expand capacity for covid-19 tests; and, \$11 billion for states, localities, territories and tribes to develop, purchase, administer, process and analyze covid-19 tests, scale-up laboratory capacity, trace contacts and support employer testing. Funds are also made available to employers for testing.

Joel highlighted actions taken by the Administration approving **29 State Medicaid Emergency 1135 Waivers** allowing numerous changes including loosening of licensing requirements from out-of-state providers, allowing some services to be performed in non-traditional settings and removing some **prior authorization requirements and suspend certain nursing home screening** requirements. CMS has also offered guidance on delivery of telehealth.

Joel noted that members that agencies will need to watch federal and state actions to learn whether coverage and other changes adopted in the pandemic will remain or phase out.

Joel highlighted the new **SAMHSA Emergency Grants to Address Mental and Substance Use Disorders during Covid-19**. He also said that 37 Members of Congress recently sent a letter to Congressional Leadership asking for \$38 billion to be included in the next stimulus package for behavioral health organizations. He will get information out to Coalition members on any new stimulus package that passes. Jim Davis, representing the Oregon Older Adults/People with Disabilities Behavioral Health Council, said that they expect funding cuts and a budget crisis due to decreased revenue and increased expenses; Oregon needs Federal help and looks to national leadership to move it forward.

Kathy Cameron noted that new funds are allocated to the Older Americans Act, including \$480 million for meals and \$200 million for home and community-based services some of which can be used for mental health services. Amy Gotwald representing N4A (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging) said that she expects the next package to address effects of social isolation and that they are pushing for increased funds for evidence-based health programs.

### **Member Updates**

**Administration for Community Living (ACL)** - Shannon Skowronski reported that ACL's priority is getting funding out to the aging services network; and helping group meal programs increase home deliveries. Shannon is developing guidance for Chronic Disease Self-Management grants

to be announced next week which will include focus on behavioral health and chronic pain and disability. There will be remote delivery of some mental health services in these grants. New funding is available for engaging older adults to address social isolation; proposals are due May 29, 2020.

American Psychological Association – Alex Watt reported that the Office on Aging is releasing materials on Covid-19 including information on telehealth, psychological services in nursing homes, flattening the curve and helping professionals address marginalized groups. APA invited NCMHA member organizations to send Alex links to their Covid-19 on-line materials that members would like APA to promote.

Department of Veterans Affairs – Michel Karal reported that the VA has made an unbelievably rapid shift from health care provided in medical centers and in Veterans homes to virtual care and telehealth. The VA National Center for PTSD has materials and online services available for everyone. A new “Covid Cope” app is available to help with employee well-being. She noted a Veteran peer specialist program. She will send links to the Coalition through Alex Watt for the 2020 Resources Update on services for aging Veterans plus mental health and substance abuse services.

Illinois Coalition on Mental Health and Aging - Mike O'Donnell shared that the Coalition has been advocating with CMS to cover phone telehealth in Medicare. The Coalition will release its strategic plan May 19 which updates its priorities and indicates how Covid-19 is impacting needed services.

N4A – National Association of Area Agencies on Aging – Amy Gotwald reported that the aging network is responding broadly to the pandemic. The two call centers operated by N4A, the Eldercare Locator and Engage, are both addressing Covid-19 and mental health issues and will release new materials next week.

National Association of Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) – Christy Malik said the organization is quite concerned about some talk during this pandemic that older adults seem disposable. NASMHPD is encouraging mental health and substance abuse service providers to address the needs of older adults, especially at this time. She noted that providers are understandably concerned that telehealth generates much lower payments than in-person visits. However, the association is advocating the funding for states for equipment to provide virtual services. She also thanked the Coalition for sponsoring the upcoming webinar on social isolation.

National Association of Social Workers - Chris Herman said that NASW is launching a Covid-19 micro website to help social workers and clients adopt successful telehealth practices. NASW is working with the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations in promoting aging services. NASW is featuring webinars that NCMHA organizations might find helpful; they are on the NASW website.

National Board for Certified Counselors and Affiliates - Jake Jackson reported that NBCC is helping counselors practice telehealth. The Board is working with state testing boards to keep licensing processes underway. NBCC is helping get restrictions on telehealth lifted. The Board has posted new information on person-centered care on the Board's website. They are working on licensure rules as impacted by Covid-19 and on the Mental Health Access Improvement Act that they hope will become part of an upcoming Covid-19 package.

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long Term Care – Lori Smetanka reported that many facility residents are being kept in their rooms. The national organization is rapidly preparing fact sheets for residents and their families about precautions for the Covid-19 pandemic. Webinars are also being developed on issues of trauma of advocates, illness and death of residents and staff, plus lessons learned. The webinars will be recorded and available on the organization’s website.

National Council on Aging (NCOA) – Kathy Cameron reported that NCOA has developed and made Covid-19 materials for professionals and older adults available on special pages of the NCOA website. Kathy recently wrote a blog for NCOA about maintaining mental health in the pandemic. Kathy directs two resource centers; one for Falls Prevention and one for Chronic Disease Self-Management. They are helping organizations across the country offer programs virtually through Zoom and other platforms. The Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs which has been shown to reduce mental health issues is already available on-line. Both the PEARLS and Healthy IDEAS programs for managing depression are looking into offering their programs virtually; they are considering on-line and increased phone use. NCOA has seen an uptick in the use of it’s on-line BenefitsCheckUp eligibility screening service. Soon NCOA will offer small grants for Covid-19 Response. The NCOA Age & Action national conference scheduled for this June in Texas will now be conducted virtually.

Nebraska Coalition on Mental Health and Aging - Lorie Thomas reported that the Coalition’s annual conference is moving from an in-person meeting to an on-line conference.

Oregon Older Adults/People with Disabilities Behavioral Health Advisory Council – Jim Davis reported that the community-based long term care system in Oregon is responding well to the pandemic. The Oregon Council that Jim chairs is taking strong stances on issues of great concern for long term care facilities, including personal protective equipment, virtual visits, no evictions and telehealth. The Council engages health professionals for guidance on policy concerns related to older adults and persons with disabilities.

Vibrant Emotional Health of New York – Kim Williams reported on activities of the organization during the meeting.

Marsha Marshall joined the meeting from Colorado. She is an individual member who appreciates staying active with mental health issues. She said that a Colorado elected official has organized volunteer effort to have all the elderly in the state called. Mental Health First Aid Training was underway before the virus struck and it will resume afterwards.

### **Adjourn**

Joel Miller thanked everyone for attending the meeting and Alex for arranging it on Zoom. The next meeting will be August 13, 2020. He reminded members about the upcoming webinar May 20. The meeting was adjourned at 11:50pm.

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