COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Considering the on-going COVID-19 concerns and Governor Hutchinson’s recent State of Emergency Declaration, the Arkansas Department of Health recommends voluntary suspension of all non-emergency or non-urgent care or services to patients until further notice. This recommendation is subject to change at the discretion of the Governor and Secretary of Health.

Social workers, like many health and behavioral health professionals, are concerned about the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on their well-being, the people to whom they provide services, their families, and others in the community.

Social workers are in a unique position to promote disease prevention efforts (including disseminating accurate information from trusted sources) and to help address anxiety and other concerns that are arising as a result of this public health crisis.

Below are links to resources to support social workers in this role. As the situation continues to rapidly evolve, we will continue to monitor developments and work to protect social workers and the clients we serve.

https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus

https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus

Preparing Your Practice for the Coronavirus Pandemic

Consider these action items if you have a private practice:

- **Teletherapy**: The use of teletherapy during this time is highly recommended to reduce transmission of the virus. If you do not currently provide services in this modality, check with your payers to verify that they will reimburse for services provided this way.
- **Cleaning and hygiene**: Follow CDC guidelines on cleaning and hygiene protocols for your workplace. Clean/disinfect daily.
- **Communication**: Let your clients know through multiple channels that you are aware of COVID-19 and that you are implementing measures to keep your office as safe as possible (e.g. cleaning, furniture arrangement, cancellation policy).
- **Management**: Identify someone who can run the key business operations in the event of a disruption to your operations.
- **Finances**: Ensure that you have enough reserve to cover expenses if you have a decline in revenue.

Preventive Measures

The CDC recommends the following to avoid spreading COVID-19:

- **Practitioners, employers, and staff who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (a fever is having a temperature of 100.4°F [38.0°C] or greater using an oral thermometer) and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).**
- Stay home when you are sick with influenza-like illness.
- **Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.**
Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes.
Cover your coughs and sneezes with a flexed elbow or disposable tissue.
Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
Keep frequently touched common surfaces clean (i.e., phones, computer equipment, etc.).
Do not use other workers’ phones, desks, offices, or other work equipment; if necessary, consider cleaning them first with a disinfectant.

What else can you do?

As social workers, we are guided by the core values of service to community, social justice and the dignity and worth of every person. We practice with integrity and competence. Social work professionals must be active participants in the community response to emerging public health crises.

We can:
- Actively participate in public and private health care policy and planning bodies to ensure that clients receive necessary and appropriate care with the guarantee of confidentiality and patient rights protections.
- Implement programs to educate colleagues and allied providers on the facts about the coronavirus.
- Know community resources and share information with clients and colleagues.
- The coronavirus epidemic will call upon social workers to utilize the bio-psychosocial approach as we apply our training and skills to engage, support, and advocate for our clients, patients, and the larger communities in where we work and live.

In case a referral is needed for suicide prevention, the following numbers can be called:
1-800-273-TALK (8255).
For Veterans, please call 800-273-8255 and Press 1.

ADH has activated a call center to answer questions from health care providers and the public about the novel coronavirus. During normal business hours (8:00am – 4:30pm), urgent and non-urgent calls, please call 1-800-803-7847 or email ADH.CoronaVirus@arkansas.gov.