



# Mental Health Association in Michigan

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## LETTER FROM LANSING

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A monthly public policy newsletter from the  
Mental Health Association in Michigan (MHAM)

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### MHAM's Statement on Racism & Equality

The Mental Health Association in Michigan considers racism to be detrimental to the individual, collective mental health and well-being of persons of color. MHAM understands that racism undermines mental health. MHAM is committed to anti-racism in all that we do. The time is now for those systems that are inhabited by racism and discrimination to be reformed and MHAM is committed to working toward that end.

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*“And so, we lift our gazes not to what stands between us  
but what stands before us  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside  
We lay down our arms  
so, we can reach out our arms  
to one another.”*

*Amanda Gorman  
excerpt from poem, “The Hill We Climb” written for the January 20, 2021  
Presidential Inauguration*

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### From MHAM President & CEO - Marianne Huff, LMSW January 2021

Welcome to the January 2021 edition of MHAM’s monthly newsletter that provides you with public policy updates and other information that impacts the behavioral health care of you and those you love. We also wish you and yours a happy new year!

January is almost over. Although it is the first month of the new year, much has happened at the federal and state level. The events of January 6, 2021 are at the forefront of our minds as many of us in America are still trying to make sense of what happened at the United States Capitol on that date. Since that time, we have watched as a new administration entered the White House on January 20 and along with the new president, there will be a new cabinet and that includes a new Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

In our state of Michigan, the chief of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Robert Gordon, resigned his post on Friday, January 22. His position is being filled by Elizabeth Hertel who has worked in the MDHHS for many years. She is also the wife of Senator Curtis Hertel, Jr. who has been the minority vice chair of the

Michigan also has a new Speaker of the House, [Rep. Jason Wentworth](#) and new members of the state house. Changes in leadership at key agencies and in the legislature usually heralds the possibility of public policy changes. MHAM will be paying attention.

As I write these words, Governor Whitmer will be giving her annual “State of the State” address this evening at 7 PM. It will be quite different this year because her address will be done virtually as opposed to being held with members of the legislature present.

We are living in a “new normal.” But this “new normal” includes an increasing number of individuals in our state who are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Since March of last year, COVID-19 has been the driving force behind the significant increase in the numbers of people who report feeling depressed and anxious. However, the instability in the political environment and the ongoing specter of racism and injustice has also been a factor.

Paul Gionfriddo, CEO of Mental Health America, reported the following on January 8, 2021, following the events at the United States Capitol

*FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2021*

***Statement from Paul Gionfriddo, President and CEO of Mental Health America***

*The mental health of the nation appears to have been demonstrably and negatively affected by Wednesday’s DC riot. This is not a surprise, but it should be yet another wake-up call that all is not well with our mental health in America.*

*On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, 11,768 people completed a screening using Mental Health America’s free, online mental health screening program ([www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)). Most of those screenings occurred before the reality of the riot sunk in.*

*Of those screened, 23.37% cited “current events\*” as one of up to three reasons they chose for their mental distress at the time they screened. 5.40% cited “racism.”*

(Read full article [HERE](#))

At the Mental Health Association in Michigan, our interest is ensuring those with mental health conditions and addictions have access to quality behavioral health services. We are evaluating the challenges these individuals must navigate daily. We are analyzing systemic barriers and asking ourselves critical questions such as, “why do individuals with mental illness land in jails and prisons as opposed to receiving appropriate treatment?” Or “why is mental health funding reduced when it is just as important as physical health care?” Although the pandemic has overwhelmed the physical health care systems, the mental health care delivery systems have also been stretched in various ways. The problem is the public mental health system has been stretched and underfunded for years—long before COVID-19 was a consideration let alone a reality.

Regardless of an individual’s age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, religion or sexuality, mental illness can and does happen to anyone. Our goal at MHAM is always to pay attention to public policy decisions that may prove to be helpful or hurtful to adults and kids who struggle with mental health issues. We plan on continuing to be the “voice of those who have no voice.”

We recognize our current public mental health system is rife with systemic barriers that interfere with the ability of an individual to get help, especially if the person lacks health insurance. Something must be done to rectify this situation, particularly for those adults and children who are not eligible for Healthy Michigan Medicaid. One of MHAM’s public policy initiatives for 2021-2022 is to address the lack of state General Fund dollars in the community mental health system. In our state, only the community mental health system is mandated to provide 24/7 access to emergency services that include psychiatric evaluation and inpatient hospitalization if it is required. This is problematic if the system does not have enough funds.

COVID-19 has pushed many of us in Michigan to our emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, and psychological limits. We have lived through a pandemic; overwhelming

economic uncertainty; anxiety about the future of our nation; and concerns about “when” it all will be “over”. We do not know the answer to that question. COVID-19 reminds me of the raptors in Jurassic Park who tested the weaknesses in the electrified fence systematically. In the same way, COVID-19 has not only tested the weaknesses in our health care system, but it has revealed them. MHAM will continue to examine what has been revealed by the pandemic as it begins its advocacy on behalf of all persons in Michigan with mental health conditions and addictions. Stay tuned as we provide you with public policy updates over the next year.

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## Public Policy Update



On January 5, 2021, House Bill 5832 was signed into law by Governor Whitmer. This bill, which was sponsored by Rep. Mary Whiteford, establishes crisis stabilization units for individuals experiencing psychiatric crises. MHAM supported this legislation because it provides individuals with psychiatric crises with an alternative to inpatient hospitalization and expands the continuum of care of available services.

According to a story that appeared in Gongwer News Service on January 5, 2021, "*Under the bill, subject to Department of Health and Human Services certification, crisis stabilization units would be created for those needing mental health services. They would provide clinical services as a short-term alternative to inpatient psychiatric hospitalization provided by a mental health professional.*

*The primary purpose of these services is "prompt assessment, stabilization and determination of the appropriate level of care" with the goal to avoid unnecessary hospitalization.*

*General and psychiatric hospitals can establish these units. DHHS will set minimum standards. These units are exempt from the certificate of need process. They must obtain and maintain accreditation within three years after initial certification or within three years of the bill becoming law.*

*The bill also provides for preadmission screening units to operate the crisis stabilization units, which must provide a professional and psychiatric evaluation within 24 hours to stabilize the patient. Crisis services can be provided for up to 72 hours. After that time, the person must be provided with the "clinically appropriate level of care," such as referral to outpatient services, referral to a partial hospitalization program, referral to a residential treatment center, referral to an inpatient bed, an order for involuntary treatment is issued or the person no longer needs treatment.*

*The bill also requires DHHS to create and operate a competitive grant program for high schools specifically designated for students recovering from a substance abuse disorder and a competitive grant program to provide grants to community recovering organizations."*

MHAM is concerned about the increased rate of suicide in our state and will be hosting a virtual town hall conversation on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 7 PM. Panelists will include a suicide survivor; an individual with thoughts about the way that social factors impact suicide; and the founder of an organization that provides support to families and others who have been impacted by suicide. We will be sending out more information in the coming days.

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## Survey on Integrated Care

Do you know what is meant by “integrated care?” Do you want your healthcare to be “integrated?” If you want to answer these two questions and participate in a statewide research survey, please click on Take Survey button below.

[Take Survey](#)

Having access to mental health care is critical right now. It is important that you continue to pay attention to your mental health during the coronavirus crisis. It is normal to feel afraid and anxious, especially when faced with a situation that has many “unknowns”. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by symptoms of anxiety, depression, or hopelessness, please reach out for help. If you are experiencing emotional distress in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, get help from:

### Michigan Stay Well Counseling via the COVID-19 Hotline

Call 1-888-535-6136

Press "8" to talk to a Michigan Stay Well counselor.

Counselors available 24/7 - confidential and free

OR

### National Disaster Distress Helpline

Call: 1-800-985-5950

Text the keyword TALKWITHUS to 66746

Available 24/7

## One more thought...

### CHARITABLE BEQUESTS

A bequest to the Mental Health Association in Michigan through your will is a powerful expression of your commitment to improving the care and treatment of mental illness, promoting positive mental health, and preventing the onset of mental disorders. A bequest can be unrestricted or restricted, and the full amount of your gift is tax deductible. If you would like more information about making a gift through your will, please contact MHAM President & CEO, Marianne Huff at [mhuffmham@gmail.com](mailto:mhuffmham@gmail.com) or call 517.898.3907

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# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

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Membership Information [HERE](#)

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