



## COVID-19 Best Practices and Resources

Behavioral Health Providers,

As Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), I encourage all providers in Maryland's Public Behavioral Health System to continue to do their part to increase the COVID-19 vaccination rate among patients and staff in this vulnerable community.

As a result of your work so far, from August to November we have seen the vaccination rate in the behavioral health community increased by 10 percentage points, 37% to 47%, with individuals 12 years of age and older who have completed the vaccine series. We aim to build on this success and provide you resources and support to achieve this. Please do everything you can to prioritize vaccine uptake, continue to leverage partnerships and utilize other available resources — like the best practices outlined below — to help your patients get vaccinated.

In an effort to understand the impact the pandemic continues to have on behavioral health services, I also strongly encourage you to complete [BHA's COVID-19 provider survey](#), if you have not already. BHA will use the responses to this fourth survey to develop interventions to address the consequences of this unprecedented crisis on Behavioral Health consumers' health care-seeking behaviors. This survey deadline is extended to Nov. 15. [Learn more.](#)

- 1. Provider Webinars:** Several BHA webinars, including [Increasing Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Service Recipients within the PBHS: Lessons from Montgomery County](#) can be found in the webinar section of the [BHA COVID-19 Recovery webpage](#).

Montgomery County has the highest vaccination uptake rates in individuals 12 years of age and older served in the PBHS than any jurisdiction in Maryland. Presenters discussed how to use communication, education, and technological interventions to close vaccination gaps and increase vaccination uptake rates. They highlighted the importance of equity frameworks, public health preparedness, and GIS data mapping to identify areas with low vaccination

coverage and develop strategies to increase COVID-19 vaccinations in those areas.

2. **Provider Training: [Utilizing Client-Level COVID-19 Vaccine Status Data Files](#)**

In partnership with Optum Maryland, five webinars were conducted to provide an overview of the functionality of the Incedo Provider Portal (IPP) for access to client-level COVID-19 vaccination status data and to review strategies to inform targeted vaccination outreach efforts. The webinars aimed to:

- Describe the nature and type of the COVID-19 vaccination status data available
- Navigate the IPP to access and retrieve client-level COVID-19 vaccination status data
- Identify data-driven strategies to increase provider vaccination rates

3. **BHA Provider Vaccine Administration Information Form**

Deadline to complete this form is extended to November 15, 2021.

[The provider vaccine administration information form](#) is for all residential programs to assess resources and technical assistance needs. To support providers' targeted outreach efforts to unvaccinated clients, MDH can set up vaccine clinics and/or mobile vaccination teams on-site or at a nearby facility to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines to the hardest-hit and highest-risk communities.

4. **How to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage**

The Sept. 23 provider alert, [How to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Acceptance Rates](#), outlines best practices and strategies to increase vaccination uptake rates among unvaccinated service recipients within the PBHS. These strategies include hosting a COVID-19 vaccine clinic on-site with a pharmacy or mobile clinic partner, including for residential and congregate living facilities, and becoming a vaccinator through ImmuNet.

5. **Best practices and strategies to increase access to COVID-19 vaccines for service recipients within the PBHS:**

- Utilize client-level COVID-19 vaccine status data files on Incedo Provider Portal and identify individuals who have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19.

- Develop a strategy to engage with identified unvaccinated individuals and support them to reduce barriers to vaccine access.
- Work with clients and other stakeholders to identify specific vaccine barriers including concern about safety, accessibility, and side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine and design tailored interventions to address those challenges.
- Initiate discussion about COVID-19 vaccination to every unvaccinated client and provide assurance of vaccine safety, efficacy, availability, and no cost.
- Highlight the collective and individual benefits of vaccination and tailor messages to include any relevant reasons why COVID-19 vaccination might be important for that unvaccinated client.
- Provide transportation services to address individual vaccines barriers including access to vaccination sites.
- Support clients with the pre-registration process and send reminder text messages for their appointments.
- Embed vaccination clinics within existing behavioral service settings to provide clients with real time access to COVID-19 vaccination.
- Expand staffing of culturally competent and trusted community messengers that reflect the community to provide vaccination at mobile or pop-up clinics.
- Develop partnerships with local organizations to implement mobile vaccine clinics for homebound individuals.
- Use existing infrastructures to bring vaccines to vulnerable populations, for instance repurpose COVID-19 mobile testing vans to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Deploy mobile vaccine clinics to homeless encampments.
- Develop tailored messaging and educational resources to educate clients on COVID-19 and mitigation strategies.
- Expand availability for walk-in vaccination clinics that do not require pre-registration.
- Implement consistent messaging for communicating clients to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines. Utilize the following resources to answer client's questions and to provide them with accurate information:
  - CDC's [Answering Patients' Questions About COVID-19 Vaccine and Vaccination](#)
  - BHA's [COVID Recovery webpage](#)
  - Maryland's [covidlink.maryland.gov](https://covidlink.maryland.gov)

Thank you for all of your hard work these many months. To support your continued efforts, BHA updates COVID-19 related resources on the [BHA website](#). For questions or more information, please email [bha.inquiries@maryland.gov](mailto:bha.inquiries@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,  
 Aliya Jones, M.D., MBA  
 Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health  
 Maryland Department of Health