

Cross-Agency Collaboration Public and Behavioral Health Issues

The following provides a high-level overview of cross-agency oversight and work to address public and behavioral health issues in South Carolina. This includes existing partnerships between the South Carolina departments of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Mental Health (DMH), and Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS).

DHEC and DMH:

- DHEC works with DMH to help ensure the health and safety of vulnerable patients at the DMH owned or operated hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities in the state.
- DHEC and DMH have a history of collaborating to expand crisis stabilization services including the expansion and flexibility created in the hospital and community-based services, as formalized in DHEC's State Health Plan. DHEC supported DMH's efforts to establish a new type of healthcare facility in South Carolina called adult crisis stabilization unit facilities. DHEC worked closely with DMH to establish standards for these facilities, which went into effect in May 2019. DHEC has recently provided support to DMH in their efforts to establish crisis stabilization unit facilities for children and remains committed to supporting DMH in their mission to support the recovery of people with mental illness.

DHEC and DAODAS:

- DHEC works with DAODAS to help ensure patient health and safety at substance use disorder facilities (sometimes referred to as facilities for the chemically dependent or addicted persons) in the state, including those owned or operated by the county alcohol and drug abuse authorities subcontracted by DAODAS.
- DHEC and DAODAS continue to work together with other key stakeholders to train, educate and equip first responders to carry and administer the opioid antidote Naloxone to victims of a suspected opioid overdose. As of March 2021, the Law Enforcement Officer Naloxone (LEON) program has trained and equipped more than 10,000 police officers in 228 organizations across the state, while the Reducing Opioid Loss of Life (ROLL) includes more than 1,700 firefighters in 113 units, resulting in thousands of lives saved.
- DHEC worked with DAODAS in 2019 and 2020 to ensure the substance use disorder facility regulations strengthen and improve treatment standards and patient outcomes in South Carolina.
- DHEC's reviews and revisions to the South Carolina Health Plan take into account the need and methods to expand access to substance use disorder services within DAODAS's statewide network.
- DHEC collaborates annually with DAODAS to update quantitative opioid-related data on the Just Plain Killers webpage. This update consists of gathering data from 9 different data sources on 19 different indicators across five different state agencies. The Just Plain Killers dashboards are the foundation for providing information to the public about the opioid crisis in South Carolina.
- DHEC works closely with DAODAS and other state partners on the state's Opioid Epidemic Response Team (OERT). This includes weekly joint calls to review data trends and target outreach efforts.

Suicide Prevention

- In 2019, **851 people** died by suicide in South Carolina. This is an increase from 811 deaths in 2018. Calls to crisis hotlines and text-lines have increased significantly in 2020.
- From June-Aug. 2020, DHEC partnered with DMH to connect close to **200 employees across the agency** with START Suicide Prevention Training, an online program that helps train people to talk to others about suicide and provide resources in a crisis.
- In July 2020, DHEC participated in a virtual SC Zero Suicide Academy hosted by DMH to help us prepare our employees to better help each other.
- Through a partnership with DMH, DHEC is preparing to implement an agency-wide workplace suicide prevention training called Talk Saves Lives as part of our Zero Suicide Initiative. This training was created by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and provided through DMH for several state agencies in South Carolina.
- Several DHEC staff are active members of the SC Suicide Prevention Coalition, which is led by DMH.
- DHEC will be assisting DMH as they pilot a Zero Suicide Communities initiative in the Midlands region. DHEC will help facilitate collaboration between DMH and community partners and will assist with outreach efforts about this initiative. This project will bring suicide prevention education and training directly into South Carolina communities.
- The South Carolina National Violent Death Reporting System reviews mental health and substance use history with respect to suicide deaths to identify risk and protective strategies, and the advisory board includes representatives from DMH and research groups focused on suicide prevention.

COVID-19 Response

- South Carolina recognizes that COVID-19 has shown a far-reaching impact on the health our communities, not only from the disease itself, but its impacts on our physical and mental health.
- DHEC, DMH, and DAODAS have worked collaboratively to promote mental health and substance use prevention messaging throughout the COVID-19 response. This includes PSAs, news releases, social media posts and other messages aimed at increasing awareness of ways to protect mental health and promoting local resources such as the SC HOPES Helpline.
- In addition, the three agencies joined the Centers for Disease and Prevention Director and other leaders in 2020 to hold an open forum to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the state of mental health and substance abuse.