

In This Issue: Behavioral Health

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On behalf of the Delaware Academy of Medicine and the Delaware Journal of Public Health, it is our pleasure to serve as the guest editors for the winter issue of the Journal. This issue focuses on behavioral health and includes articles that address the importance of behavioral health as an important component of the overall health and wellbeing of our communities. The issue also includes an interview with Jim Lafferty who is retiring after 21 years as the executive Director of the Mental Health Association in Delaware. The interview is a tribute to Jim, who has worked tirelessly to advocate for more and better mental health services for Delawareans. Jim has shown through his work and dedication, that one person can have a significant, positive impact on the lives of many people.

The focus on behavioral health in the Delaware Journal of Public Health is timely. Delaware has been working to address the state's health care challenges through development of the first Delaware state Health Improvement Plan (spearheaded by the Division of Public Health) and through the Health care Innovation Plan, supported by a Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) grant. Both plans engaged members from state government, the health care communities and their clinical teams, academic institutions, as well as payers and consumers to assess the status of our health system and the health of our population.

Both efforts are working toward the goal of transforming the state's systems of care and improving the overall health of Delawareans. These plans have embraced the importance of behavioral health for overall health and encourage a better integration of behavioral and physical health care.

The articles in this issue span a range of behavioral health topics from Alzheimer's Disease, to early onset of psychosis in young adults. There are also several articles focused on two other key areas- the work that has been done in Delaware to improve service delivery for adults with serious mental illness and the impact of childhood adversity on health. A recent landmark milestone in the state has been Delaware's successful completion of a 5-year settlement agreement with the Department of Justice that resulted in a re-design of Delaware's public adult behavioral health system. Several articles in this issue describe the impact of the system re-design on the improved health outcomes and quality of life for persons with behavioral health conditions.

Other articles address the effects of adverse childhood experiences (also known as Aces) on health across the lifespan. Over the past 20 years, a body of research has demonstrated a dose response relationship between exposure to childhood adversity and numerous adult health conditions including cardiovascular, lung and liver disease, drug and alcohol use, depression and suicide. More recently, studies have also documented negative impacts of exposure to adversity on child and adolescent health and well-being. These findings have led to the suggestion that Ace exposure is a public health crisis and requires a public health approach. The articles on Aces in

this issue utilized Delaware-specific data and support the association between exposure to early adverse events and physical and behavioral health problems both in children and in adults.

The articles in this issue highlight both behavioral health research and practice occurring here in our state. They illustrate the importance of viewing behavioral health as a fundamental component of overall health and wellbeing and the importance of an integrated and public health approach to preventing and responding to behavioral health conditions experienced by Delawareans.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue and that it promotes continued dialogue about how Delaware can enhance the health and wellbeing of all its citizens.

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