



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

MDHHS realigns to improve coordination of behavioral health services

Farah Hanley appointed chief deputy director for health

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LANSING, Mich. – Michigan residents will experience improved behavioral health care services under changes being announced today by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

A restructuring within MDHHS will ensure that behavioral health services are supported across community-based, residential and school locations, as well as other settings. The changes will benefit people of all ages, with addressing the needs of children and their families a top priority.

“It’s been a tough few years, especially for our kids, and it’s so important we do whatever we can to support Michiganders who have struggled. That’s why I am committed to improving behavioral health services, especially for children,” said Gov. Whitmer. “The changes announced today will leverage the expertise, resources and work happening across the department to improve behavioral health. I am grateful for MDHHS’s hard work to respond to the needs of Michiganders and provide more oversight and resources for Michigan’s children, youth and families.”

MDHHS today also announced the appointment of Farah Hanley as its chief deputy director for health, which has been vacant since last fall when Dr. Joneigh Khaldun left for the private sector, as well as the appointment of Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian to the chief medical executive position on a permanent basis.

In her new position, Hanley will oversee the new Behavioral and Physical Health and Aging Services that is part of the reorganization announced today, and the State Hospital Administration. Hanley, who was MDHHS’s acting director in January 2019 during the transition to a new administration, has served as the senior deputy of Financial Operations since 2014. She will begin her new position Monday, March 7.

Bagdasarian was appointed chief medical executive when Khaldun left the position. Bagdasarian previously served as a senior public health physician at MDHHS.

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Other changes include:

- Creating the Bureau of Children’s Coordinated Health Policy and Supports to improve and build upon the coordination and oversight of children’s behavioral health services and policies.
- Shifting the administration of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration to different administrations and divisions within MDHHS to improve coordination of services and leverage expertise that exists among staff in these areas.
- Renaming the MDHHS Health and Aging Services Administration to Behavioral and Physical Health and Aging Services. This administration – which already handles Medicaid and services for aging adults – will oversee community-based services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, serious mental illness and substance use disorders. This will build upon the administration’s existing efforts to deliver services to adults with mild to moderate mental illness.
- Moving substance use and gambling disorder prevention programs to the Bureau of Health and Wellness under the Division of Chronic Disease within the Public Health Administration.

“Everyone deserves access to behavioral health care where and when they need it,” said MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel. “Everyone should have the same experience – services that can be life-changing or even lifesaving – no matter where they live and no matter where they turn for help.

“This change will help us coordinate resources more efficiently and establish one voice regarding physical and behavioral health policy,” Hertel said. “It also will help give more support to providers, strengthen policies to make them more effective, create consistency in access and, ultimately, improve outcomes for children, families and adults.”

Creation of the Bureau of Children’s Coordinated Health Policy and Supports is based on the belief that services must be designed specifically for the needs of children, including those transitioning through different health care settings. For example, mobile and intensive crisis services for children and youth should be different than those addressing adult needs.

The new children’s bureau will emphasize the critical importance of including families in addressing the health needs of children. Efforts will reinforce needed protections for youth so they can access the most appropriate services when they are needed rather than turning to an emergency room or child welfare services.

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The bureau will work hand-in-hand with other MDHHS administrations to address children's behavioral health crises and to focus on expanding dedicated partnerships and advocate relationships.

The new structure, effective Monday, March 21, will improve coordination of care and collaboration with stakeholders. It will also improve direct support to children, families and providers transitioning between care settings or who need more intensive clinical review.

The department will retain current staff positions under the restructuring.

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