

Summary of the Delaware Psychological Association's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant  
January 1, 2023- December 31, 2025

As we exit the third year of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is clear that the challenge to the population has been overwhelming, and has adversely affected mental health at all ages. We know from past disasters and pandemics that this trauma results in the worsening of anxiety and insomnia. A significant number of people will develop post-traumatic stress symptoms as well as depression. Mental Health America, which maintains the largest online screening platform in the US, indicated that there was a 93 % increase in people taking the anxiety screen, and 68% increase in people taking the depression screen. The number of people screening high for both disorders tended to increase through 2021. Those in the health care professions are at even high risk due to daily exposure at work not only to the virus but to the trauma of disease and death.

Initial data from the National Institute of Mental Health, one year into the pandemic indicates that the most affected are the most vulnerable, nationally and in Delaware. We know that those with severe and persistent mental illness were more likely to contract COVID, and had a higher death rate. We also know that the opioid crisis worsened and death rates from opioids have increased.

Clearly there is a need for efficient screening and access to effective treatment for anxiety, post-traumatic stress and depression. Identifying individuals who need help and linking them to services is critical. Access to effective, evidence supported treatment for PTSD, anxiety and depression is essential. Those treatments must be accessible to people, in an acceptable format and they must utilize a proven effective approach. Accessible, acceptable and effective are the goals.

The first set of materials will be universal, for the entire population. More targeted self help materials will be developed or edited from existing resources to help health care professionals, educators, public service professional and other workers who were adversely affected by COVID. In addition, we will have outreach through Healthy Communities Delaware to identify specific communities that have been unusually adversely affected.

Regarding the first part of the project, there will be universal communication on the needs of people during the pandemic and post pandemic. Other programs have been established as part of the American Rescue Plan to ensure that basic needs of housing, food, transportation and medical care have been met. Through the existing United Way 211 service, people can access information on meeting those needs. Mental health resources are already included in 211. In addition, to increase mental health awareness and promote resilience, we would create, as part of this program, a series of podcasts/prerecorded webinars on the impact of stress, how to deal with anxious and depressed feelings, and recognizing anxiety, depression and PTSD, along with some basic self-help strategies.

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These would be recorded by psychologists, social workers, counselors and psychiatrists through the DPA program and advertised through 211 and through other mechanisms. Content would be based on some of the programs that have already been developed by DPA in the past year.

Goal 1: Sample Webinars and podcasts:

- COVID 19 & Impact of Stress
- COVID 19 & Diabetes – risks and stressors.
- COVID 19 & Schools – Are the kids alright?
- Returning to Work. Reducing worry about COVID 19.

The second part of the program is to improve the skills of mental health clinicians in providing treatment for post covid stress. Over the three year period, we propose offering a series of 1 to 3 hour continuing education programs for all mental health clinicians and minimal or no cost to all professions on:

- a. The essential background of trauma informed care which shapes our response to the trauma of the pandemic
- b. Creating self help programs available to the public
- c. Screening for traumatic stress, anxiety and depression and
- d. Then longer workshops (1/2 day) on treatment of PTSD, anxiety and depression.

The initial CE programs will include the background framework on COVID Trauma informed care, universal effective self help strategies, and screening for PTSD, anxiety & stress. We will partner with Mental Health America to use their online screening tool, and when a person identifies themselves as living in Delaware, they will be referred to our website for the public. The sequence of the remaining workshops on treatment will be determined by the Coordinating Mental Health Education Board of DPA. We have specifically identified representatives from our local universities that offer clinical programs in psychology, social work and counseling. Our goal is to increase and diversify the pipeline of competent behavioral health clinicians. Our goal is to develop core content on these important topics that can be delivered to the healthcare professionals, students, and members of the public.

If you are interested in hearing more about this grant please email Kelly Wetzel, Executive Director, at [delpsycho@gmail.com](mailto:delpsycho@gmail.com).