

BUILDING A HEALTHIER MARYLAND

STATE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN



Public Health Services Administration



National Gun Violence Awareness Month

Maryland's Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention (the Center) was established within the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) in October 2024 through the passage of [Senate Bill 475](#) by the Maryland General Assembly. The Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and

Intervention frames its work within three pillars: Prevention & Assessment, Intervention & Response, and Community Resilience & Healing.

To achieve MDH's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) goals to reduce firearm suicides and homicides, and injuries across the state, the Center will implement key strategies within the core pillars. These strategies include the development of a Firearm Violence Data Dashboard, a grantmaking program, and coordination between agencies and jurisdiction.

The Firearm Data Dashboard centralizes the latest public health data on firearm-related deaths, emergency department visits and hospitalizations related to nonfatal shootings, and circumstances of firearm-related deaths, allowing for informed decision-making and discussion.

Data includes homicides, suicides, unintentional injuries and deaths, and nonfatal injuries caused by firearms.

This year, the Center is investing \$1.7 million in communities across the state to support nonprofit organizations, local health departments, and other partners to implement evidence-informed programs. The grants include funding for community violence intervention funding, safe storage campaigns, a community engagement campaign, and an evaluation of Maryland domestic violence surrender processes. These grants are more than funding, they are investments in safety, healing, and hope for communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence.

Additionally, the Center will serve as a hub to connect agencies, local health departments, law enforcement, community members, advocates, medical professionals, and others to assess the current landscape of gun violence prevention programs and campaigns. We will conduct a needs assessment to better understand the strengths and struggles around the state to develop solutions and resources to improve the state's response to gun violence.

By promoting and upholding public health strategies, we can address violence prevention and root causes that allow gun violence to persist, and promote safer communities.



Maryland Expands Behavioral Health and Community-Based Services for Youth

The Maryland Department of Health has received federal approval to expand behavioral health and home and community-based services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbances. This amendment to Maryland's 1915(i) state plan broadens eligibility and streamlines access to critical mental health services across the state. Key updates include new Medicaid coverage for youth peer support services, reduced administrative burdens, and easier assessments for behavioral health treatment. The initiative aims to improve care coordination, reduce institutionalization, and ensure more equitable access to services for families statewide.

[MDH Press Release](#)



Time to Update Alcohol Warning Labels: Addressing Cancer Risks

A recent article from *Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine* emphasizes the growing evidence linking alcohol consumption—even in small amounts—to an increased risk of at least seven types of cancer, including breast, liver, and colorectal cancers. Despite this, current U.S.

alcohol warning labels, unchanged since 1989, do not mention cancer risks. On January 3, 2025, then-U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a health advisory recommending that alcohol containers include warnings about the cancer risks associated with consumption. Public health experts advocate for updating these labels to better inform consumers and support cancer prevention efforts.

Read the full article here: [Why Alcohol Needs a Cancer Warning Label](#)



CDC Reports Significant Decline in U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates a nearly 24% decrease in drug overdose deaths in the United States for the 12 months ending in September 2024, compared to the previous year. This marks the most substantial annual decline since the onset of the opioid crisis, with approximately 87,000 deaths reported, down from around 114,000 the prior year.

Several factors have contributed to this decline, including the widespread distribution of naloxone, improved access to evidence-based treatments for substance use disorders, and enhanced surveillance of the illegal drug supply. The CDC's Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) program has played a pivotal role by providing real-time data to inform local prevention and response strategies.

Despite this encouraging trend, overdose remains the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 44. Additionally, five states—Alaska, Montana, Nevada, South Dakota, and Utah—reported increases in overdose deaths, underscoring the need for continued vigilance and tailored interventions.

For more information, click [here](#).

Public Health Observances

Prioritizing LGBTQ+ Health During Pride Month



Each June, Pride Month honors the legacy of the 1969 Stonewall uprising and celebrates the resilience, visibility, and rights of the LGBTQ+ community. It's also a crucial time for public health professionals to reflect on and advance equity in healthcare access and outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Individuals within the LGBTQ+ community continue to experience significant health disparities driven by discrimination, stigma, and a lack of affirming and culturally responsive care. From mental health challenges to barriers in accessing preventive services, the gaps are real—and persistent.

As we recognize Pride Month, we encourage health departments and partners to reaffirm their commitment to inclusive, data-driven, and community-informed strategies that promote health equity for LGBTQ+ populations. Improvement initiatives must intentionally address these disparities to create a healthcare system where all individuals—regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity—can thrive.

To learn more on pride month click [here](#).



Breaking the Silence Around Men's Mental Health

June marks Men's Health Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about the often-overlooked issue of men's mental health. While physical health is frequently emphasized, mental well-being is equally crucial. Men are nearly four times more likely to die by suicide than women, highlighting

the urgent need to address this silent crisis.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) encourages communities to support men by:

- **Starting conversations:** Check in with the men in your life—fathers, brothers, friends, and colleagues.
- **Sharing resources:** Normalize seeking help by providing information about mental health services and support groups.

- **Creating safe spaces:** Foster environments where men feel comfortable discussing their mental health without judgment.

By taking these steps, we can help dismantle the stigma surrounding men's mental health and ensure that no one struggles in silence.

Learn more and access resources at NAMI's Men's Health Month page:

<https://www.nami.org/get-involved/awareness-events/mens-health-month/>



Take Action to #ENDALZ

June marks Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, a time to spotlight the more than 55 million people worldwide living with Alzheimer's or other dementias. This month, the Alzheimer's Association encourages

everyone to take charge of their brain health and join the fight to end Alzheimer's.

Purple is the official color of the Alzheimer's movement. By wearing and sharing purple throughout June, you can help raise awareness and invite others to join the cause. Use the hashtag #ENDALZ to share your story and show support for those affected by Alzheimer's.

Early detection of Alzheimer's offers significant benefits, including greater access to treatment options and the ability to plan for the future. The Alzheimer's Association provides resources to help you recognize the 10 early signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's and offers guidance on how to approach memory concerns in others.

Adopting healthy habits—like regular exercise, quality sleep, and a balanced diet—may reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Incorporate these habits into your life and encourage others to do the same.

Join the movement this June. Together, we can make a difference.

Learn more and get involved at: alz.org/abam

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