

Governor

Today's focus is on the mental health of Vermonters.

More Vermonters are in crisis, and more deaths by suicide – my team working is working to reverse these trends and are tracking mental health data as part of pandemic recovery.

Additional funding is in the budget (residential facilities, etc.) and is a critical part but we know many VT's don't rise to this level but feeling stress and struggling with so many things taking a toll on all of us – from the pandemic, supreme court decisions, war, gas prices, inflation, crime – it's okay to not be okay, but there is always reason for hope.

Secretary Samuelson, AHS

53 million people (1 and 5 adults) in the US are facing mental health issues. Mental health is central to each of our lives – impacting every aspect of life. Need to be vigilant for those in acute crisis, but important to pause and reflect on all of our mental health.

It is different for everyone, but examples of ways to improving your mental health:

- Volunteering
- Being outdoors
- Participating in community
- Gathering with friends and family

Sometimes connections aren't enough, and you can seek grief counseling for someone to talk to – seeking out counselor or coach great way to talk about everyday life stressors.

Deputy Commissioner Alison Krompf, DMH

988 the national suicide crisis hotline will begin this Saturday – anyone facing issues dial 988 to access free, confidential, and compassionate care. VT has been planning for this rollout for 2 years.

988 is not only for your own mental health challenges but also serves as a resource for help with children, family, friends. 24 hours a day staffed by human beings.

Other resources that are already in place are:

- 211 for referrals for services and supports
- Pathway support line – peer support/shared experience
- Crisis text line – text VT to 741741

Take stock of how you are doing and learn about what you can do to improve your mental health.

Mental health issues were on the rise prior to the pandemic. In the post pandemic world, the need for supports increased, but social and community support have frayed a little and will take time. You are not alone. Call on leaders to be a role model in fostering resilient people when you build resilient communities. In VT we know certain communities are disproportionately affected with mental health concerns - LGBTQ+ community and black, indigenous and POC. Vermont's best resources are our community mental health centers.

Katina Idol – Lamoille Valley Mental Health

The silver lining of the pandemic is that it has been recognized that mental health is for all.

Thank you to everyone who provided direct service – during an incredibly challenging time for those providing care to someone besides themselves.

It makes sense to feel stressed right now. Increased rates of anxiety, substance use, depression – schools personnel are burned out, all of our children missed some level of development. How do we move beyond just being okay? We have all experienced collective grief, trauma, and loss – once we can accept that we can start to move on.

How do we heal & become resilient - 1 positive relationship at a time. Acknowledge it is hard – lean on each other.

Practice self and community care

1. Positive social connections (not social media)
2. Practice gratitude
3. Have purpose and passion
4. Go outside
5. Move your body - 11 minutes is all it takes to reset your system
6. Create routines and rituals
 - a. Positive relationships
 - b. Sleep, nutrition, hydration
 - c. Exercise, dancing, outdoor sports/activities
 - d. Music, art, playing
 - e. Mindfulness, yoga, tai chi
 - f. Journaling, building, creating
 - g. Supportive community groups

Questions and Answers

How are we staffing these services (988) with so many workforce challenges?

Gov. - Challenges in every sector – we along with others are stretched thin, but we are doing what we can to do the services we need to do. That is why we need to focus on workforce – need to bring more people in to the state, but we are doing pretty well.

Krompf - Lots of coverage for states being unprepared for 988, but we have been planning for years and are fully staffed for 24-hour accessibility with backup coverage in NH

Is 988 a suicide prevention line?

Krompf - Suicide and crisis lifeline you do not need to be suicidal to call that number.

Do you think uptick in crime related to MH?

Gov. - Exacerbated by pandemic and mental health crisis, but majority illicit drug activity – that is what we are seeing throughout VT and throughout the nation

Will the state make utilization data on 988 public?

Krompf - National 988 requires data collection by state that is not identifiable, and it will be published. Indicators reported on will be suicide prevention, utilization, etc.

Would VT offer over the counter birth control?

Gov. - Better question for health care providers than me. VT is well protected with state law and prop 5 – solidify through constitution.

Should VTs be bracing for tough election on Prop 5 given the national scene – battleground for national groups given prop 5?

Gov. - I believe it will pass, but politics is fickle. My feeling when I take the temperature of Vermonters is that they want to protect the ability and freedom to access healthcare services between you and provider - to make decisions about your own body.

With national rise in COVID cases – Biden administration may be recommending a booster in the fall – changed VT approach?

Gov. - Will most likely see uptick in fall as we go inside, experts will determine variants and vaccine booster recommendations. Expect similar to flu for years and years to come.

Levine – situational update – Northeast has the lowest numbers of new cases compared to national context. We are seeing new variants – approximately 50% of cases, but not seeing uptick in disease activity (cases, hospitalizations, and death). On the vaccine – an extra booster being entertained for those below 50 – will be national decision made in a couple of days – main reason not because of extreme risk to this population, but because of waning immunity.

Should those that have had 2 boosters already expect to get a third in the fall?

Levine - Yes – especially if proposed vaccine includes protection from the new variants – looking for availability sometime in October. Should be seen as annual covid vaccine.

Newest variants seen to be most infectious – at same time we have dropped all our mandates – what risks are they are?

Levine - Highly transmissible – akin to measles. Variant will cause a lot of illness around the country, but not seeing major increases in hospitalizations and deaths. VT quite stable- but need to take personal risk and tolerance of risk into your judgements. Continue to look at community levels (right now low). Think more closely about - 1) degree you have someone in life who is especially vulnerable and that should influence your own behavior 2) don't have a lot of information about long COVID with newest variant but believe the risk is reduced with vaccination, but something to think about. If you are well vaccinated (up to date), have access to therapeutics if you do get ill – we know to a greater degree how to live with the disease. You should mask if you feel comfortable.

Update on 5 and under COVID vaccine rollout?

Levine – 2200 received 1st dose (50% in health care setting) out of an eligible population of 26,000 – consider positive finding due to recent start and is 3-4 times of national rate – per tradition VT is leading. Suspect may happen in primary care visits as this age group has a lot more visits with their pediatrician. VT has abundant vaccine available.

Health care financial stability – hospital budgets – how is the state going to help?

Gov. - Signed reluctantly a bill that gave GMCB four million to study – we are in this together to work on this because it is going to be a huge lift. Great challenge exacerbated by inflation and pandemic. Pledging to work with GMCB, hospitals and legislature. No one has the answer at this time, but working together we have the opportunity to.

You do have control of GMCB Board composition. Do you want to see it going in different direction?

Gov. - Have at least 2 openings to fill. As always, I look for competence and right attitude.

6 of 7 gun violence incidents drug related as far as I can tell. What is state going to do to fix drug problem?

Gov. - Complex situation that takes time to build effective strategy. Need to also take a look at expungement of records in the state – youth used as mules, and we never know it because records are expunged. Doing what we can, but intend to do more.