



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 14, 2017



Wolf Administration Shares Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Holiday Season Tips and Resources

Harrisburg, PA – Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) Acting Secretary Jennifer Smith, Department of Human Services Acting Secretary Teresa Miller, and Department of Aging Secretary Teresa Osborne today spoke in the state Capitol Rotunda to share resources and advice for individuals and families affected by mental health and substance use disorders.

“The holiday season’s pace can be stressful for anyone, but for individuals with substance use disorder and their loved ones, the season can bring unique challenges. Strained relationships and triggering environments like celebrations with drinking or drug use can put people in situations with the potential for a relapse, and spending more time with family may bring a loved one’s unknown struggles into light,” said Acting Secretary Smith. “Whether you are in recovery, seeking treatment for the first time, or need information on how you can help or support a loved one’s journey, there are resources available throughout the holiday season.”

“When many of us think of the holidays we think of a joyous occasion filled with families gathering together, celebrating, and eating one too many desserts. However, many people can experience feelings of anxiety or depression during the holiday season,” said Miller. “People who live with a mental health condition should take extra care of their overall health and wellness during this time.”

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (or NAMI), extra stress, sentimental memories, or unrealistic expectations can lead to the holiday blues. One in 5 adults suffer from a mental illness in America.

“These individuals are our loved ones, neighbors, and coworkers,” said Miller. “If you or a loved one are suffering from mental illness there are services available to help. If you are in need of immediate help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.”

In a recent survey by NAMI, 64% of people said they were affected by the holiday blues. The following are a few tips for addressing your mental health:

- Stick to normal routines as much as possible;
- Get enough sleep;
- Take time for yourself, but don’t isolate yourself. Spend time with supportive, caring people; and
- Get exercise, even if it’s a short walk.

The holidays may also be difficult for individuals in recovery, especially if they become stressed by changes to their schedule or daily routine, have strained or non-existent relationships with family members, or are faced with potential triggers while attending holiday parties and other celebrations. Planning ahead, Acting Secretary Smith said, can help individuals in recovery prepare to overcome stressful situations.

“Remember your support system, and do not hesitate to use them if needed. Whether they are with you at the time or accessible by phone, they can help you work through a situation without jeopardizing your recovery,” said Acting Secretary Smith. “If you are alone and cannot access your support system, the Get Help Now helpline can also be an ally.”

DDAP maintains a toll-free helpline that connects callers looking for treatment options for themselves or a loved one to resources in their community. You can reach the Get Help Now helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). The helpline is available 24/7 – including Christmas Eve and Day and New Year’s Eve and Day. An anonymous chat service offering the same information to individuals who may not be comfortable speaking on the phone is also available at www.ddap.pa.gov.

“Chronic health issues, feelings of loneliness, loss of loved ones, and strained family relationships can accelerate feelings of depression, increase alcohol consumption, and can make the holidays a very difficult time for some older Pennsylvanians,” said Secretary Osborne. “While the holidays are a time of gathering with family and friends, they can also be a source of stress, so it’s important that seniors stay connected to supportive peers and reach out to local resources in order to work through any challenging situations that may arise.”

Families can support their loved ones in recovery by limiting their drinking or other substance use, properly disposing of old and unwanted prescription medication, and by creating a welcoming, safe, and compassionate environment for their loved one. This includes respecting what a loved one may or may not want to talk about, avoiding rehashing old problems, and being understanding if your friend or family member needs to remove themselves from a triggering situation.

For more information on treatment options in Pennsylvania, county-based resources, and the Wolf Administration’s efforts to combat the heroin and opioid epidemic, visit www.pa.gov/opioid.

MEDIA CONTACT: Ali Fogarty, DDAP – 717-547-3314
Rachel Kostelac, DHS –717-425-7606
Drew Wilburne, Aging – 717-705-3702

###