



Throughout our 60-year history, Aetna Better Health of Louisiana continues to evolve to adapt to new consumer health needs and expectations. In integrating behavioral health and physical health components, we're constantly improving our consumers' health, expanding access to health care, and reducing costs. This newsletter is specifically dedicated for our providers with updates, resources, and articles. We want this to be a place where you can share your voice. If you are interested in contributing to the newsletter, have ideas or suggestions, or you and your organization are interested in partnering with primary care organizations to integrate behavioral and physical health to treat the person as a whole, please contact Brian Guess at GuessB@aetna.com.



SELF-CARE

The connection between self-care & mental health

By Monica Vermanl

Self-care may seem like just the latest buzzword or passing trend, but in reality, it is a commitment to ourselves—a promise to factor ourselves into the equation of our lives. When we optimize self-care, we feel better, look better and have more energy. And quality self-care is linked to improved mental health, with benefits like enhanced self-esteem and self-worth, increased optimism, a positive outlook on life and lower levels of anxiety and depression.

We're all we have, and we owe it to ourselves to take care of our physical and mental health. While we don't set out to do ourselves harm, self-care often ends up last on the list of priorities in our busy lives.

When we're tired, angry and dissatisfied with ourselves, we reach for a quick fix to feel better. We over-indulge in habits and behaviors that offer

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temporary relief or distraction, but do not make things better. When the day is done, we're often too tired to sleep... and we wake up the next day and do it all over again. The solution: bringing in quality self-care that sustains us and ensures that we factor ourselves into the equation of our lives.

Five steps for enhancing self-care

We need to understand that we can step back, press pause and direct our energy on taking care of ourselves. We need to realize that we can choose to live our lives in a way that supports and optimizes both our physical and mental health, fitness and well-being.

1. Make quality a priority in your life. Quality food, rest and time to connect with friends, family and ourselves feeds, repairs and restores the body, mind and spirit.

2. Pay attention to your thoughts. Challenge negative self-talk, fears and feelings of inadequacy.
3. Be as nice to yourself as you are to others. We're often our harshest critics and most relentless worst enemies.
4. Start saying no to requests to help others when you are running on empty or don't have the time to take care of your own need.
5. Stay connected to yourself. Engage in an activity or experience that brings you joy, no matter how briefly. Sit in the sunshine. Listen to a favorite song. Meet a friend. Walk in nature. Simply do something that brings joy and love and keeps you connected to yourself.

You can read this article in its entirety [here](#).



CLINICAL

More adults than ever are seeking attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medications – an expert explains what could be driving the trend

By Margaret Sibley

Despite the growth in awareness of ADHD over the past couple of decades, many people with ADHD, particularly women and people of color, go undiagnosed in childhood. But unlike depression or anxiety, ADHD is quite complicated to diagnose in adults. Diagnosing ADHD in either kids or adults first involves establishing that ADHD-like traits, which exist on a continuum and can fluctuate, are severe and chronic enough to prevent a person from living a normal, healthy life.

The average person has a couple of symptoms of ADHD, so it can be hard to draw the line between ADHD-like tendencies – such as a tendency to lose keys, having a messy desk or often finding your mind wandering during a dull task – and a diagnosable medical disorder. There is no objective test to diagnose ADHD, so doctors typically conduct a structured patient interview, ask family members to fill out rating scales and review official records to come up with an actual diagnosis.

Diagnostic challenges can also arise for psychiatrists and other health care practitioners because ADHD shares features with many other conditions. In fact, difficulty concentrating is the second most common symptom across all psychiatric disorders.

In 2021, the U.S. was still deep in the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. People were still losing jobs, facing financial strains and juggling work-from-home challenges such as having children at home doing online schooling. Many families were losing loved ones, and there was a huge sense of uncertainty over when normal life would return.

The demands of the pandemic took a toll on everyone, but research shows that women may have been disproportionately affected. This may have led to a greater proportion of adults seeking stimulant treatments to help them keep up with the demands of daily life.

You can read this article in its entirety [here](#).



Preparing children with autism for the holidays

By Cathy Pratt, Ph.D., BCBA-D

While many happily anticipate the coming holiday season, families with children on the autism spectrum also understand the special challenges that may occur when schedules are disrupted and routines broken.

The following tips were developed with input from the Autism Society of America, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Easterseals Crossroads, Sonya Ansari Center for Autism at Logan and the Indiana Autism Leadership Network and are great tips to share with the families you work with this time of year.

- Preparation is crucial for most individuals. At the same time, it is important to determine how much preparation a specific person may need. For example, if your child has a tendency to become anxious when anticipating an event that is to occur in the future, you may want to adjust how many days in advance you prepare them. Preparation can occur in various ways by using a calendar and marking the date of holiday events, or by creating a social story that highlights what will happen at a given event.
- Prepare a photo album in advance of the relatives and other guests who will be visiting during the holidays. Allow your child access to these photos at all times and also go through the photo album with your child while talking briefly about each family member.
- If your child has difficulty with change, you may want to gradually decorate the house. For example, on the first day put up the Christmas tree, then on the next day decorate the tree and so on.
- Engage your child as much as possible in the decorating process. For some, it may also be helpful to take them shopping with you for holiday decorations so that they are part of the process. Allow them to help decorate as well.
- Inform them of the process for removing decorations, since this process may be disruptive for some individuals as well.

- If having decorations around the house does become disruptive for some, try to revisit pictures from previous holidays that show decorations in the house. If such a book does not exist, use this holiday season to create a picture book of your family preparation and traditions.
- Once holiday decorations have been put up, you may need to create rules about those that can be touched and those that cannot be touched. Be direct, specific and consistent.
- Understand that with some individuals, decorations may not be feasible.
- Develop a visual schedule or calendar that shows what will be done on each day.
- If you are traveling for the holidays, arrange to have your child's favorite foods, books or toys available. Having familiar items readily available can help to calm stressful situations.
- Use social stories or other communication systems to prepare them for any unexpected delays in travel.
- If your child is flying for the first time, it may be helpful to bring your child to the airport in advance to help them become accustomed to airports and planes.
- Use stories and pictures to rehearse what will happen when boarding and flying the plane.

You can read this article in its entirety [here](#).





PROVIDER MONITORING

CDC guidelines around sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention and treatment

The first message around this initiative was in the previous provider newsletter and focused on Talking to your patients about STIs and that regular screening is part of being healthy. That article can be viewed [here](#).

The second part of the CDC campaign, **Talk. Test. Treat.**, to help stamp out many of the STIs that are treatable and often curable is ‘Test’. We are committed to the overall health of our members and is doing regular campaigns to improve the screening and treatment of many STIs that are on the rise in Louisiana. Patients may not be comfortable discussing all aspects of their life even with a reassurance of privacy, so be sure to share options for screening/testing through the links below and in some cases – self-test kits.

Test: Test your patients for STIs as recommended. Use the sexual history to determine **which STIs to test for** and **the anatomical sites to test**.

STI screening recommendations for different patient populations are available. Below is a brief overview.

- **All adults and adolescents age 13 to 64** should be tested at least once for HIV.
- **All sexually active women younger than 25 years old** should be tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia every year. Women 25 years and older with risk factors such as new or multiple sex partners or a sex partner who has an STI should also be tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia every year.
- **Everyone who is pregnant** should be tested for syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C starting

early in pregnancy. Those at risk for infection should also be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea starting early in pregnancy. Repeat testing may be needed in some cases.

- **All sexually active men** who have sex with men should be tested:
 - At least once a year for syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea. Those who have multiple or anonymous partners should be tested every 3 to 6 months.
 - At least once a year for HIV and may benefit from testing every 3 to 6 months.
 - At least once a year for hepatitis C, if living with HIV.
- **Anyone who engages in sexual behaviors that could place them at risk** for infection or shares injection drug equipment should get tested for HIV at least once a year.

Keep in mind that screening recommendations are sources of clinical guidance, not prescriptive standards. Always consider a patient’s sexual history and the burden of disease in their community.

Once a patient has been tested, make sure they know how they will get their test results.

Changes in testing and/or treatment is also a good reference point for opening the conversation. There are many self-test options, so even if the patient isn’t ready to test today, they can access the [Louisiana Health Hub](#) to explore options for themselves.

To learn more, the [provider portal](#) on the CDC site is a great resource.



Focus on fluoride varnish

Fluoride varnish can be applied by pediatricians and physicians during an annual wellness check. By using **CPT code 91188**, providers can get reimbursed for Fluoride varnish applied to children age 6 months to 5 years old.

Dental caries disease is preventable, yet it is the most common chronic childhood disease in the U.S. (Clark et al., 2020). Fluoride varnish application for the prevention of dental caries in children is the standard of care in pediatric primary care practice (Clark et al., 2020). Guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Clark et al., 2020) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF, 2021) recommend that primary care clinicians apply fluoride varnish to the primary teeth of all infants and children starting at the age of primary tooth eruption.

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) has initiated a process improvement program for all MCOs to work with PCPs, to improve the percentage of enrollees age 6 months through 5 years who received one or more fluoride varnish applications to a primary tooth by their PCP.

Below are some educational information and links from LDH:

- Informational Bulletin 16-7, revised June 27, 2017: Professional Services Fluoride Varnish Program Policy. Physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners can qualify for reimbursement for fluoride varnish services by reviewing the “Smiles for Life Caries Risk Assessment, Fluoride Varnish and Counseling Module” and passing the post assessment, www.smilesforlifeoralhealth.org, course no. 6: Caries Risk Assessment, Fluoride Varnish & Counseling.
- **[Well-Ahead Louisiana resources on preventive oral health](#)**
- **[Well-Ahead resources for fluoride varnish applications by PCPs](#)**



Shatterproof: Free substance use disorders web-based treatment locator



Developed in 2020 by **Shatterproof**, a national nonprofit organization, **Treatment Atlas** is a free web-based treatment locator displaying transparent, objective information on the quality of addiction treatment facilities. Working in tandem with treatment providers, Atlas brings information to the forefront, helping individuals with substance use disorders, families and community members alike access and compare treatment facilities that best meet their needs. Not only does Atlas support those seeking treatment, but it also serves as a valuable

resource to drive system-level change within the treatment landscape by providing unique, password-protected portals for payers, states and providers to use when comparing services within and across networks.

Atlas is built upon **Shatterproof's National Principles of Care for Substance Use Disorder Treatment**. The principles are a set of evidence-based best practices shown by multiple research studies to improve patient health outcomes when treating SUDs. The principles are endorsed by experts across the addiction treatment and healthcare fields as critical components of SUD treatment.

To ensure quality and transparency across the addiction treatment field, Atlas is built upon two main data sources: information provided within a treatment facility survey, completed by providers

and information collected through patient experience surveys. To learn more about this data – how it is collected, how it is displayed and why it is vital to those seeking care – check out the **Treatment Atlas YouTube channel**, visit **TreatmentAtlas.org** or contact **Atlas@shatterproof.org**.

Atlas is currently available in 14 states – California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Wisconsin – with discussions underway for further expansion across the country.



FREE CONTINUING EDUCATION

Q4 2023: Fighting the substance abuse epidemic

Aetna Better Health of Louisiana sponsored TPN.health provider trainings

- Aetna Better Health is sponsoring three trainings in Q4 2023 with the theme of Fighting the Substance Abuse Epidemic.
- The trainings will launch monthly in October, November and December.
- After the live trainings launch, they will be available in the on-demand library.
- The trainings are FREE, and continuing education (CE) and continuing medical education (CME) units are awarded to behavioral health and physical health licensed professionals upon completion of the webinar(s).
- Since these sponsored events are accredited by ACCME (Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education), all three trainings count toward the new DEA eight-hour training requirement to renew or acquire a DEA license.

To learn more, scan the QR code or go to <https://app.tpn.health>.





Screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment (SBIRT) for substance abuse

- Screening quickly assesses the severity of substance use and identifies the appropriate level of treatment
- Brief intervention focuses on increasing insight and awareness regarding substance use and motivation toward behavioral change
- Referral to treatment provides those identified as needing more extensive treatment with access to specialty care.

Coding for screening and brief intervention reimbursement. Reimbursement for screening and brief intervention is available through Medicaid.

Medicaid description/billing code

- Alcohol and/or drug screening: H0049
- Alcohol and/or drug screening, brief intervention, per 15 minutes: H0050

Follow up

When substance abuse is identified, schedule appropriate follow-up treatment. For newly diagnosed patients, schedule 3 follow-up appointments within the first 30 days. Frequent contact early on will help to keep the patient connected and motivated for treatment.

Educate your patients on effects of alcohol or substance abuse. Educate during each visit, ensuring your patients understand the treatment options available to them.

For more information, visit https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sbirtwhitepaper_0.pdf. For a free copy of the SBIRT white paper, call the Aetna Quality Department at 504-667-4500, Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM, and we will email you a copy.

For a list of available treatment service options, call Provider Relations at 1-855-242-0802 (TTY: 711), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Narcan/naloxone availability

As per Louisiana's standing order, naloxone is available to Medicaid enrollees without a prescription at your local pharmacy. Members who are on Medicaid can get naloxone for free at their local pharmacy. The naloxone standing order can be found at <http://ldh.la.gov/opioids>.



Louisiana harm reduction efforts

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines harm reduction as “an evidence-based approach that is critical to engaging with people who use drugs and equipping them with life-saving tools and information to create positive change in their lives and potentially save their lives.” Harm reduction is an important tool in an overall prevention and treatment strategy to combat substance abuse and promote recovery.

Harm reduction vending machines are an innovative tool that improves access to needed risk reduction supplies to reduce the transmission of bloodborne infections, prevent overdose deaths and foster a supportive environment for individuals seeking recovery. Central Louisiana AIDS Support Services in Alexandria, LA, and Northeast Delta Human Services District in Monroe, LA, have implemented the vending machines and they are free to the public. Items in the machine include narcan, deterra, fentanyl test strips, rapid HIV tests, pregnancy tests, safe sex kits, needle cleaning kits, hygiene kits, wound care kits and period packs.

To learn more about the benefit of harm reduction strategies, visit SAMHSA at [Harm Reduction | SAMHSA](#). If you are interested in bringing a harm reduction vending machine to your community, read more at the National Council for Mental Wellbeing website at [Enhancing Harm Reduction Services in Health Departments – National Council for Mental Wellbeing \(thenationalcouncil.org\)](#). To learn more about harm reduction efforts in Louisiana, visit the Louisiana Health Hub at louisianahealthhub.org/hrdhub.



Aetna Better Health[®] of Louisiana

Housing support services

What are housing support services?

Aetna Better Health's housing specialists have knowledge and experience in how to help our members obtain and maintain affordable housing

What services do housing specialists offer?

- Provide members with information about and referrals to shelters, resource centers and affordable housing providers
- Assist members and their care manager with completing housing application
- Determine if members qualify for permanent supportive housing (PSH) and assist with PSH applications

How do members sign up for housing support services?

Members can ask their care manager to connect them to a housing specialist or members and providers can reach out directly to the Aetna Better Health housing specialist at HousingReferralinbox@aetna.com or call Member Services at 1-855-242-0802 (TTY: 711), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For more information on member benefits, scan the code below or visit aetnabetterhealth.com/louisiana/whats-covered.html.





Aetna Better Health[®] of Louisiana

Employment support services

What are employment support services?

Aetna Better Health's employment specialist has knowledge and experience in how to help our members obtain and maintain employment.

What services does our employee specialist offer?

- Provide members with information about and referrals to vocational, employment and business development services
- Help members and their care managers complete employment applications
- Participate in ongoing collaboration with employment agencies as needed

How do members sign up for employment Support services?

Members can ask their care manager to connect them to the Aetna Better Health employment specialist, or members and providers can reach out directly to the employment specialist at LAEmploymentReferrals@Aetna.com or call Member Services at 1-855-242-0802 (TTY: 711), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For more information on member benefits, scan the code below or visit aetnabetterhealth.com/louisiana/whats-covered.html.

