



Washington Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

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April 22, 2020

Re: Providing Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services as Essential Healthcare Services during the COVID-19 epidemic

Dear Fellow Healthcare Leaders, Administrators and Colleagues,

On behalf of the Washington Society of Addiction Medicine, the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Washington who specialize in the treatment of addiction, we would like to urge you to ensure that your home institutions and institutions with whom you collaborate, are making available treatment services for patients with substance use disorders to the greatest extent possible under during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Prior to this epidemic, Washington state was already in the grips of an opioid epidemic and witnessing increasing consumption of alcohol and rates of other substance use. During the COVID-19 epidemic, people with these serious (and in many instances life-threatening) health conditions have continued to suffer from these conditions and need appropriate care now. Many institutions have opted to close addiction treatment facilities or greatly curtail treatment offerings. This puts our public health at risk and jeopardizes the well-being of very vulnerable people in our society. We are beginning to see that in many cases, people who have been living under the stay-at-home order and with new or worsened stressors such as job loss, financial problems, exposure to domestic violence, etc., have resorted to increased substance use further worsening their well-being and posing longer-term damage to them, their families and communities they live in.

Washington Society of Addiction Medicine is dedicated to increasing access to and improving the quality of addiction treatment for patients in Washington. To that end, we are committed to advocating to ensure that patients with mental health and substance use disorders (SUD) receive needed treatment. It is critical that we recognize SUD treatment services are essential healthcare services and our patients, colleagues and communities need to have these accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) is leading the effort to support clinicians, healthcare institutions, governmental administrators and policy experts across the country around standards for safe and effective treatment of SUD during the COVID-19 pandemic. ASAM has developed guidance addressing many aspects of providing care for patients with SUD during the COVID-19 epidemic including appropriate infection mitigation strategies for outpatient and inpatient treatment settings, treatment guidelines for opioid treatment programs and outpatient medication treatment for patients with opioid use disorder among others. They have been working dilligently to continue to update these resources as new developments in the epidemic are understood and gaps are identified. These resources are freely available to everyone at their website: <https://www.asam.org/Quality-Science/covid-19-coronavirus>

Along with the national experts from ASAM, myself and other colleagues from the Washington Society of Addiction Medicine can provide further guidance and consultation to support expanding treatment services for patients with SUD during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Caldeiro', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan M. Caldeiro, MD, FASAM
President, Washington Society of Addiction Medicine