

April 2020



Dear Stakeholders,

Over the last month, IDHS staff working in our psychiatric hospitals, developmental centers, and local offices have been on the front lines, serving our community, and doing everything they can to save lives and to provide essential services to the residents of Illinois.

None of us expected to be in this position, but -- just like the front-line staff in your organizations -- they responded to the call and are facing this crisis head-on with courage and perseverance, and I am proud to work with them every day. And I am proud to work in partnership with all of you as well. I know that you have staff that are doing the same thing -- working on the front lines of this crisis to serve the people that need services now more than ever. I want you to know that we are in this together. Your issues are our issues and your concerns are ours.

We know from the data and experts that our job is to flatten the curve. We estimate that our IDHS population of patients and residents in State facilities may be affected by COVID-19 more than the general population because of their underlying medical conditions. Epidemiologists say 20% of the general population *with positive COVID-19 diagnoses* will become very sick.

We estimate that as many as 30% of our patients and residents with positive COVID-19 diagnoses in our facilities will become very sick. We are taking every precaution to ensure that we can anticipate and care for individuals in our hospitals and developmental centers who will become very ill.

As hard as it is to admit -- no matter the setting -- staying at zero is not realistic, which is why flattening the curve and not experiencing catastrophic, system-breaking infections and deaths is so important.

I know that the last few weeks have not been easy for you, and it has not been easy for our IDHS facilities either. Our dedicated, direct-care employees at our own 24/7 facilities do not have enough PPE to do their work. The Governor and I are fighting every single day to get more resources; more PPE, tests, ventilators, and supplies.

As you know, we commissioned a survey about PPE needs that reflect an urgent demand among IDHS-funded, community-based providers. The data from that survey has been shared with our sister state agencies and the Governor's office. I want you to know we are working in very close partnership -- at the highest levels -- with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois Department of Public Health to secure more PPE for the people on the front lines who need it right now.

We know we will not get everything we need right away, and we will need to make strategic decisions to use what we receive in a smart way. The Governor, his staff, his cabinet team, including me, will not stop working until we get the supplies and equipment that we need.

I don't know how long this fight against COVID-19 will last. But, I can promise you this: everything we do at every level of our State government, every single day, has two goals in mind, neither of which is more important than the other –the health and safety of our citizens, and the well-being of our IDHS employees. Not a single decision is made without thinking about our staff and the health and safety of the people you and your organizations support and care for, and it will continue to be that way as long as I am Secretary.

We are in this fight together. Whether you are providing life-preserving direct care, disability, mental health, substance use treatment or other life-sustaining services, we are in this together on the front lines.

Sincerely,
Grace

Grace B. Hou
Secretary, IDHS