COVID-19 Guidance for Funded Providers and “News You Can Use”
*Interim Guidance*
Version Date: 3/23/20

The AIDS Institute (AI) recognizes that COVID-19 is having a significant impact on clients, the community, and the agencies who serve them. The purpose of this document is to provide information to help AI-funded providers develop a plan to address COVID-19. We hope this information will complement other relevant agency policies and procedures (e.g., infection control practices, client transport, etc.).

The AI funds a wide range of agencies, from grassroots organizations to large medical systems. We understand that each agency’s COVID-19 response will be different, and you will adopt policies appropriate to your agency’s needs and in alignment with its existing structures, obligations, and requirements.

Please contact your contract manager or AI-COVID19@health.ny.gov with any questions.

Q1: Where should I go for current information about COVID-19?
A: The best source of current general COVID-19 information are the NYSDOH and CDC websites. Please check frequently as information is continuously being added and updated.

Q2: Does the AI have any suggestions on how programs can be prepared to prevent and respond to COVID-19?
A: In addition to regularly reviewing the information on the NYSDOH and CDC websites, agencies can prepare by:

- Making a plan for training staff on COVID-19 information
- Making a plan for communicating with clients
- Ensuring cleaning schedules and practices are adequate
- Instructing staff and clients to limit physical contact (consider elbow bumps instead of hugs, for example)
- Making additional supplies available to staff (tissues, hand sanitizer, etc.)
- Posting signs about coughing/sneezing etiquette in prominent locations throughout the building
- Posting signs about good handwashing technique in bathrooms

Q3: If COVID-19 disrupts an agency’s ability to meet program deliverables, what will the consequences be?
A: The AI recognizes COVID-19 is causing disruptions that may affect contractors’ ability to meet deliverables. The AI is committed to remaining flexible to accommodate
extraordinary situations where practical issues (e.g. staff or client quarantine, facility closure, etc.) impede contractors’ ability to meet program deliverables.

Q4: If staff are quarantined, will an agency still be able to voucher for staff time?
A: Agencies should consult their human resources staff and employment policies. AI will reimburse agencies for expenses that are vouchered in accordance with agency policies.

Q5: Our agency brings a lot of people together for focus groups, support groups, trainings, education sessions, etc. Should we rethink this to stop COVID-19?
A: Depending on the nature of the event, alternative strategies for delivering program services may be possible (e.g., webinar instead of in-person training). We recognize this may not always be the case. If you have specific plans to modify your delivery of program services, please consult with your contract manager.

Q6: What is the AI’s stance on offering staff the possibility of teleworking and changing work schedules to accommodate COVID-19 related considerations (e.g., child care, etc.).
A: As allowable under your agency policies, the AI encourages providers to be flexible to accommodate staff needs during this disruptive time.

Q7: If we have the capability to offer services remotely to clients, will you allow us to?
A: Yes, the AI encourages agencies to use remote means to serve clients, including but not limited to telemedicine/telehealth technologies. If you have unique ideas on how to better serve your clients at this time, please discuss them with your agency leadership and AI contract manager.

NYS Medicaid expanded coverage of telehealth services in 2019. Per Insurance Law and Public Health Law, services that are covered under a comprehensive health insurance policy or contract cannot be excluded when the service is delivered via telehealth. To the extent it is practical, the Department encourages the use of telehealth to provide COVID–19 related services to Medicaid members. More information on the current telehealth policy can be found in the March 2020 Medicaid Update Special Edition here and the February 2019 Medicaid Update here.

Q8: My organization provides services funded by the AIDS Institute. Are we considered an “essential” agency?
A: The AIDS Institute funds a variety of agencies and services that are critical to public health. Agencies may consult the Governor’s guidance on essential services under the ‘New York State on PAUSE’ Executive Order to assess whether they conform to the criteria established therein. Agencies providing services deemed essential are allowed to continue providing those services.