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## HELPING HANDS: COVID-19 AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



- June 18, 2020
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**Written By:** Fadia T. Shaya, PhD, MPH, Professor and Executive Director of the Behavioral Health Resources and Technical Assistance Program

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**Editor's Note:** *This post is part of a series of [Helping Hands](#) stories authored by School of Pharmacy faculty, staff, students, trainees, and alumni who stepped up to assist their family and friends, colleagues, and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The [Behavioral Health Resources and Technical Assistance \(BHRT\) Program](#) at the School of Pharmacy conducts research and provides guidance and assistance to communities across Maryland in addressing substance misuse and abuse prevention issues. BHRT's mission is to improve public health by bridging the gap between research and practice.

On June 8, BHRT, in conjunction with the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Population Health Improvement (OPHI), hosted a (virtual) meeting during which all jurisdictions in the state came together to share their experiences with COVID-19. The discussion addressed "Responding to Prevention Needs in Today's Environment." Various jurisdictions in the state discussed how they continue to manage their prescription drug misuse and substance use prevention activities, how they form contingency plans for future programs, and how they have adjusted current activities to reach more members of the community in the context of the pandemic. The discussions highlighted the impact of the social determinants of health surrounding COVID-19. At the conclusion of this meeting, participants learned more about:

- how different jurisdictions made implementation adjustments during COVID-19
- effective strategies to create new prevention programming to address community needs in the upcoming months in the face of the pandemic
- how to develop future contingency plans and alternative activities for extenuating circumstances, including a resurgence of the pandemic

Some of the adjusted activities included moving meetings and classes to online platforms, increasing virtual communication via blogs and newsletters, and creating incentive programs to encourage community members to participate in activities at home. One jurisdiction held a drive-in community health fair where organizations set up booths, and people were able to drive by to ask questions and gather information while maintaining social distancing. Another adjustment was made in response to cancelled drug take-back programs. Program leaders attached blank information postcards to Detera drug disposal pouches distributed at the pharmacy to measure how many medications were being disposed.

The BHRT Program also shared some recommendations about how to use this time for capacity building to strengthen outreach programs. One recommendation included building awareness of coalitions and prevention activities through livestreaming on social media. By hosting these sessions via Facebook and/or Instagram, community members can engage and ask questions in real time.

Another recommendation was to reach out to other programs in the community and work together to reach target audiences. BHRT looks forward to hosting more of these discussions, as sharing knowledge of best practices can improve strategy implementation methods and outcomes statewide.

The BHRT team includes staff members Shardai Jones, Vanessa Michel, and Nicole Sealfon; postdoctoral fellows Apoorva Pradhan and Michelle Taylor; and PharmD students Meghan Bhatt and Victoria Wolfe.

[Learn more about BHRT and get involved here.](#)

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