



Dear Friends, Families, and Affiliates – 12.22.2021

We hope this message finds you healthy and well as we approach the end of 2021. We are happy to report that many of our participants were able to return to services during the year and we had the pleasure of welcoming some new staff and participants to our programs. Even though precautions were necessary to protect health and safety we were able to enjoy a wide variety of activities and hosted our annual summer BBQs and will be enjoying a socially distanced visit from Santa before we break for Christmas. Ability and Choice has also added Host Home services during 2021 with homes in Utah, Salt Lake, Tooele and Davis Counties.

We would like to wish all of you a happy holiday season and look forward to the start of 2022. We have included updates to Ability and Choice operations as well as some important upcoming legislative efforts. We hope you will take the time to read through these items and please reach out if you have any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and your loved ones.

Happy Holidays!

Staff Wages – 2022 State Budget and Legislative Session

As most of you are aware, competition for staff over the past couple of years has been very tight, not only in our industry, but also competing with other non-Medicaid employers. Attached is a flyer with information on how you can support current efforts being taken to create change in funding that would impact increased wages for direct support staff in our field. Please support our efforts by contacting state officials and urging them to support a significant increase in the Medicaid rates which funds our programs.

You can get more info, sign up for emails and guidance of who to contact with talking points at <https://www.crisisofcare.com> or on the attached flyer. Stories directly from our participants and their families of what consistent and quality provider caregiver services mean to you is what will have the greatest impact. We hope you will join our efforts!

Emergency Operations Update 2021.12.23

As 2021 comes to an end, we are continuing to monitor current trends and medical advice regarding our services and the public health emergency. At the time of the drafting of this message Utah's cases have been gradually dropping. We will maintain our current precautions through the holidays and into the first couple weeks of January before evaluating for reduction of precautions as it is expected that case counts may rise as families gather for the holidays.

If trends go as expected and case counts get to 800 per day or less for Utah, we foresee the next step for ACS services is to loosen restrictions for those who can't wear masks on transportation with documented medical need and loosen restrictions for masks at our hubs

when physical distancing can be maintained. Physical distancing will be with us for the foreseeable future.

Holiday Gatherings

Health officials urge caution and common sense when gathering for the holidays. When gathering with others outside the household, even family members, precautions should be utilized to minimize the spread of COVID and other illnesses. The recommendation is to be tested a couple days prior to the gathering and to minimize public interactions if your gathering will include high risk individuals regardless of your or their vaccination status. Likewise, staff and participants and/or their residential supports are required to promptly notify their programs if they become aware of a possible exposure during these gatherings or other situations.

Close Contact Exposure

Currently, exposure occurs after being in close contact for more than 15 minutes collectively over a two-day period with a confirmed COVID positive person. If asked or recommended to quarantine by the Health Department the person being quarantined should do the following:

- Stay as isolated as practicable from all others
- Do NOT go to any congregate settings (such as our Day Hubs), other's homes and utilize technology to deliver any needed documents or via a no-contact drop only after prior ACS approval
- Attend meetings and other appointments which do not require physical presence utilizing technology such as Zoom or TeleHealth
- Limit non-essential trips and trips that other non-quarantined members of your household or others can complete
- If possible, isolate from other non-quarantined members of the household with separate sleeping quarters and bathroom
- Complete the follow-up testing procedure in a timely manner as recommended by the Health Department, currently seven days after initial exposure

For close contact exposure and you are not asked to quarantine, the person should increase their physical distancing where practicable, and reconsider activities to limit exposure of others and wear a mask when outside the household around others.

Day Hub Closures

Depending on the program location, staff and participants may be asked to not come to their normal site due to an exposure event. In that event, ACS will work with the Health Department in determining if staff or participants should be quarantined or can be re-located to another site and/or cancel shifts. If asked to quarantine, everyone is asked to follow the guidelines outlined by ACS and the Health Department for quarantining and testing for their return. Depending on the situation, this may involve being tested twice, once after the closure and again before returning after seven days.

Honesty and Reporting Requirements

3855 S 500 W Suite E, South Salt Lake, Utah 84115 - 801.281.0700 - www.abilitychoice.org
Day and Residential Supports along the Wasatch Front

If you become aware of a potential exposure due to contact with others in the community, you are required to report the exposure to your program's manager immediately before attending the program sites, reporting for work, or receiving community-based supports such as supported living or supported employment. ACS will provide you with direction on the need for quarantine based on guidance from the Health Department.

We are currently utilizing the "honor system" for reporting and vaccination status. We recommend retention of documentation in case there is a need for us or someone else to verify results.

If we discover that someone has not been truthful with reporting COVID and related status to us or if they are not timely in reporting an exposure to ACS, there may be both significant disciplinary, civil and possible criminal liability. This may include discipline for a safety violation such as suspension or termination from the program, falsification of a government document such as vaccination or testing results, or even an APS referral for neglect.

Vaccinations in General

As stated previously, and now pursuant to Utah law, we are not currently pre-emptively monitoring vaccination status of anyone, are not requiring vaccinations, and not asking for the reasons to not be vaccinated whether they be personal, religious or medical. However, the Health Department may have different guidelines on quarantining if exposed depending on your vaccination status and we will provide that guidance as needed. You may also end up having a longer recovery time and other long term side effects if un-vaccinated. Each person must decide for themselves what works best for them and their situation.

Weekly Testing for Staff

ACS is not under either the OSHA or CMS rules for vaccination mandates. However, we are currently testing staff using the PCR COVID-19 test weekly. This testing is optional for vaccinated staff and mandatory for unvaccinated staff. We expect to continue testing through the winter of 2022.

Current ACS Standards

Mask Wearing - General - ACS Property

- Everyone should evaluate their own personal health and make their own decision stay home due to illness.
- Mask wearing is mandatory when around staff and other participants for those who can wear them.
- Physical distancing and other general precautions are still very important, the masks and vaccinations are only the last line of defense after all other precautions have failed.
- Individuals who have a communicable illness should follow our call-in procedures for absences, re-schedule or switch to a video visit.

Mask Wearing - Transportation

- Federal regulations require wearing masks on all modes of public transportation.
- Mask wearing while transporting program participants is still required of all passengers. We will be re-evaluating this strict requirement in January.
- For van transportation, 2 people per row for most trips.

Physical Distancing

- Physical distancing should be observed to the greatest extent practicable. 6-10 feet is ideal when indoors. 3-6 feet from other groups when in the community.
- The ability to properly physically distance should be evaluated when planning all activities regardless of mask use or vaccination status.
- When an environment becomes difficult to physically distance, should be given modifying the activity.
- Activities should be avoided where large crowds of 50+ people are expected to be in attendance.

Vaccinations

- ACS encourages everyone to be vaccinated with all three shots.
- Most individuals have had the opportunity to obtain the vaccination.
- Whether or not to be vaccinated is a personal choice to be made by each individual and their medical professionals.
- ACS does not monitor or require vaccination for participation or as a condition of employment or determine mask wearing status on whether or not an individual is vaccinated.

Screening - General

- For unknown or infrequent visitors, temperature checks and basic questioning will be required to inquire if they have been sick or been around others who were sick in the last 72 hours.
- We ask that everyone self-monitor their health status and alert us before attending when practicable for potential consideration for absence.

Exceptions & Variances

- New exceptions or variances may be requested on mask wearing and other precautions, they will be evaluated on a case-by case basis. Considerations include weighing the safety of all individuals involved including the participant, staff and the community.

Courtesy and Respect

- ACS staff shall refrain from judging, discriminating or otherwise harassing others for their choice to wear a mask or not or employ other measures. Program participants should be encouraged to follow the same behavior. It is acceptable to politely ask others to keep their distance if you feel uncomfortable or crowded.
- All of ACS's anti-harassment and anti-retaliation policies still apply. Please report such behavior to your regional Director or to Kendra or Dan.

Staffing Crisis

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. **CONTACT** THE UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE.

- ▶ Email Angie Pinna, DSPD Director at apinna@utah.gov
- ▶ Email Tracy Gruber, DHS Director at tracygruber@utah.gov
- ▶ Contact Governor Spencer Cox at Governor.utah.gov/contact

2. **EXPRESS** YOUR SUPPORT OF THE UACS FUNDING REQUEST OF \$40,000,000

- ▶ This will give providers the ability to raise starting wages from \$11.75 an hour to \$17-18.00 an hour to compete with fast food, retail, and Amazon.

3. **SHARE** YOUR STORY

- ▶ How have services been important to you and your family?
- ▶ How would a shortage of staffing impact your family and loved one?
- ▶ Your thoughts on why it is important to have professional and well-trained staff?



4. **SCAN** THE QR CODE TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT OR VISIT THIS WEBSITE <https://tinyurl.com/cocutah>



- ▶ We will keep you updated and send out important updates during the legislative session

THE CRISIS:

- Turnover is at an all-time high and on average, providers have a 20% vacancy rate.
- Maintaining health and safety becomes impossible without staff
- Providers cannot raise their rates. Utah sets rates for DSPD providers.
- Unlike other industries competing for a similar workforce, DSPD providers cannot simply decrease or limit their hours of operation when staffing is short.

To learn more about the UACS funding request or more about the staffing crisis, please visit
www.crisisofcare.com