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## State Psychiatric Hospitals Improving Under Gov. Murphy

### By Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Commissioner, NJ Department of Health

On my first day on the job I was told that Ann Klein Forensic Center (AKFC) was in jeopardy of losing its accreditation from the Joint Commission, a drastic step that could have resulted in us shutting the facility down.

Now, just seven months later, AKFC, as well as the three regional psychiatric hospitals, are in full compliance and in the midst of a major transformation to modernize clinical care and rectify long-standing patient safety and physical plant improvements.

DOH on August 24 released an Executive Assessment of the hospitals by the New Solutions consulting firm and the Department’s 18-month Action Plan for the hospitals, which outlines significant strides that have already been made including the hiring of 220 clinicians and other staff. In addition, there is a \$23 million capital plan to make critical physical plant upgrades.

We are changing the culture of the hospitals. We have focused on enhancing clinical care, improving patient and staff safety while continuing to reduce the census and patient assaults.

Across the hospital system, there has been a 30-percent reduction in violent assaults to both patients and staff in the first quarter of this year vs. the first quarter last year. In addition, the census at the four hospitals has declined by nearly 60 patients from 1,510 in January 2018 to 1,453 last month.

As any hospital CEO will tell you, it takes time to improve the quality and safety of care in hospitals. Nevertheless, we are laser focused on achieving sustainable improvements for patients and family members.

Our vision is to have the hospitals operate as one health system of regional psychiatric facilities using the same clinical and patient safety standards. Just like acute care hospital systems or a children’s hospital, our regional psychiatric hospitals should be specialized hospitals where patients are treated, stabilized and then returned to the community—with the supports they need.

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## Department Promotes Tick Awareness

The New Jersey Department of Health launched a Lyme disease prevention campaign on Aug. 20 to educate the public about how to prevent tickborne diseases.

The campaign includes billboards around the state, digital advertising and a promotional social media about tick prevention with the slogan, “Don’t Let a Tick Make You Sick” and the hashtag #TargetTicksNJ.

Lyme disease is an illness caused by bacteria that is carried by infected ticks. This infection can cause a variety of symptoms and, if left untreated, can be severe. Lyme disease is spread to people by the bite of an infected tick and is not spread from person to person. To prevent Lyme disease, it is important to avoid tick bites by using insect repellent, wearing protective clothing, avoiding wooded areas with dense shrubs, checking yourself, children and pets after time outdoors and keeping shrubs and lawns trimmed.

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*This digital billboard promoting awareness of the dangers of tick bites began appearing along New Jersey roads on August 20.*

*Top: Commissioner Elnahal, second from left, and Deputy Commissioner of Health Systems Marcela Maziarz, right, joined Trish O’Keefe, Vice President of Atlantic Health System, and Brian Gragnolati, CEO, Atlantic Health System, on a tour of Morristown Medical Center on July 16.*

## Don't Forget Back-To-School Vaccines!

As summer quickly comes to a close and you begin readying your children for back-to-school activities, vaccines should be part of your summer bucket list!

August is National Immunization Month, which serves as a reminder to parents about the importance of getting their children vaccinated to protect against disease throughout the school year. Child care facilities are especially vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases. Children in these settings can easily spread illnesses to one another due to poor hand washing, not covering their coughs and sneezes, and other factors such as interacting in crowded environments.

The Department [this month announced](#) the winner of its "Hot Shots for Tots" immunization campaign. It is a voluntary incentive program that uses a point system to encourage child care facilities to promote best practices and improve immunization coverage. In its first year, the campaign was piloted in Monmouth County. Each winner received a certificate from the Department to acknowledge their work on this important issue. For more information, visit the Department's [webpage](#).

In addition to childhood vaccinations, National Immunization Awareness Month reminds us that vaccinations are needed across the lifespan. Immunizations are especially important for those who are in close contact with infants, seniors, people with weakened immune systems, and those who cannot be vaccinated because of their age or certain medical conditions.

On Aug. 27, Dr. Elnahal visited Princeton Adult Day Care Center to talk to clients about the importance of adults getting critical vaccines such as influenza, shingles, pneumonia caused by pneumococcal bacteria, hepatitis and whooping cough.

Information about vaccines, recommended immunization schedules for all age groups and the Vaccines for Children Program (a federally-funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children of low-income families) can be found at the CDC [website](#).

## New Jersey Facing Emergency Blood Shortage

Blood donations are needed year-round but especially during the summer months for many reasons. Students are on summer break, resulting in schools and colleges not scheduling blood drives. In addition, summer holidays like Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day result in a lower number of donors. Businesses are also less likely to schedule blood drives due to employee vacations.

New Jersey Department of Health Principal Deputy Commissioner [Jackie Cornell visited the American Red Cross Central New Jersey Blood Donation Center in Princeton on July 27 to donate blood](#) amid a national blood shortage and encouraged New Jerseyans to give blood, if able.

"It was a simple and relatively painless process," Cornell said. "It's really important for people to get out here and donate."

A single unit of blood from one donor can save up to three lives, and there is no artificial substitute. The nationwide blood shortage is the perfect opportunity for people to roll up their sleeves and make a significant difference in someone else's life. Every donation is important because every two seconds someone in the U.S. needs a blood transfusion due to illness, to treat an injury, or during surgery, according to the American Red Cross. While 40 percent of people in the United States are eligible to give blood, less than 10 percent do. That number is even lower for New Jersey, where only 3.6 percent of eligible people donate.

New Jersey hospitals rely on licensed blood collection facilities to supply them with blood and blood products such as platelets. Currently blood products are being distributed to hospitals faster than donations are coming in, so donors are needed to replenish the supply. Blood transfusions are needed daily due to the needs of cancer patients, accident and burn victims, mothers delivering babies and newborns, surgery patients, transplant patients and those patients requiring chronic transfusions.

Additional blood drives are held to help meet the demand, and hospitals in rare circumstances may even "import" blood from other states if supplies reach critical levels. American Red Cross blood drives are being held every day to help meet the demand and to ensure that blood is available at New Jersey hospitals when patients need it.

The Department is encouraging donors to explore a range of donation options by contacting their nearest blood center. [Visit the American Red Cross website](#) to search for local blood drives.



*DOH Health Educator Jennifer Smith joined Monmouth County health officials on Aug. 22 to honor the winners of our Hot Shots for Tots immunization competition.*



*Deputy Commissioner Cornell visited the American Red Cross Central New Jersey Blood Donation Center in Princeton on*



# State Psychiatric Hospitals Improving Under Gov. Murphy

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Consistent adherence to the most up-to-date practice standards—while maximizing time between clinicians and patients—improves outcomes and ensures successful transitions to community settings.

Extensive changes already have occurred at AKFC, a 200-bed facility in West Trenton for those with mental illness who are involved in the criminal court system. Two weeks before the Murphy Administration began, the Joint Commission informed AKFC that it could lose its accreditation if it did not end a long-standing administrative lock-in policy in place on certain shifts.

Under the leadership of the Department's new Deputy Commissioner Deborah Hartel, Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke, and AKFC CEO David Kensler, AKFC retained its accreditation by ending administrative lock-ins, hiring 111 staff and making anti-ligature improvements to prevent patients from harming themselves. Other improvements include making sure that appropriate labels with expiration dates are in place for all medications and having a pharmacist review 100 percent of patient charts monthly to ensure that allergies and adverse drug reactions are clearly separated and listed.

Another hospital that has demonstrated strong performance is Ancora in Winslow Township. It was recently cited by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as a national leader in integration of trauma-informed care, which recognizes that past traumatic experiences can affect a person's mental well-being.

Greystone in Morris Plains has increased supervision and oversight on one-to-one monitoring to ensure patient safety, opening up more time for clinical staff to spend with higher acuity patients.

In addition to Deborah Hartel as Deputy Commissioner for Integrated Health, who is overseeing the psychiatric hospital system along with Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke, we named a new CEO for Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital. The new CEO at Greystone is Tomika Carter, who became acting CEO this summer. Carter most recently worked as the Associate Executive Director at Bellevue Hospital in New York, where she also has served as an in-patient psychiatric coordinator, addiction counselor, caseworker and discharge planning supervisor. She also worked as a case manager and discharge planner at Rikers Island.

A new medical director and chief nursing supervisor were also hired in recent months. Despite a national and state shortage of psychiatrists, hiring of clinical staff is an ongoing priority.

I will thank all of the staff at the hospitals now for the hard work and dedication we will continue to expect as we move forward in this major turnaround effort.

The Department's Action Plan is based in part on recommendations contained in an Executive Assessment by New Solutions, a consulting firm hired by the previous administration to evaluate hospital operations. The Executive Assessment, the Department's Action Plan in response to the Executive Assessment and a Fact Sheet are available [at the Integrated Health Services website](#).



*On August 23, Commissioner Elnahal visited Ann Klein Forensic Center (AKFC) and Trenton Psychiatric Hospital (TPH) in West Trenton. The Commissioner visited AKFC to thank employees for their implementation of changes that better protect patients and staff, and improve treatment.*

*The Commissioner then toured TPH's Treatment Mall and saw the therapeutic options including a medical exam room, music room and an art therapy room.*

## Congratulations to....

Tim Seplaki, data coordinator in our Office of Emergency Medical Services, who won the 2018 [New Frontiers Award](#) at the Imagetrend Conference on July 18 for collecting opioid overdose/Narcan data that's used by EMS & law enforcement statewide.



Seplaki's other work includes converting more than one million EMS electronic patient care reports annually into actionable, publicly accessible intelligence products - including EMS agency response times - and serving as the primary point of contact for the implementation of New Jersey's EMS data law with 500+ participating agencies.

He spearheaded the collection of naloxone administration data for people who have overdosed on opiates from EMS and law enforcement statewide, converting it into a usable format, and disseminating it to multiple stakeholders across New Jersey to help develop strategies to stop the epidemic of opiate deaths.

"Creating products that allow people to make better decisions to improve the health of our communities is something that I'm passionate about," Seplaki said. "OEMS is committed to helping our EMS clinicians and the entire emergency care community improve clinical care through research and data. Numbers, when used appropriately, really can save lives."

## Commissioner Joins Booker, Menendez at Health Care Forum

Medicinal marijuana proved to be the most effective pain management for 7-year-old Jake Honig, a lifelong Howell resident who passed away in January after battling a rare and aggressive form of brain cancer. Not only did medicinal marijuana allow him to spend his final days at home with family, but it improved his symptoms, mood and appetite.

"Medical marijuana made it possible for Jake to be a kid again, play video-games at home and enjoy time with his little sister — all things that a variety of traditional medications made it very difficult for him to do," Health Commissioner Dr. Shereef Elnahal said during a panel discussion with U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez on Aug. 6 at Capital Health Medical Center – Hopewell. "He is a true testament to the therapeutic nature of the program we are expanding here in New Jersey."

Hosted by news outlet NJ Spotlight, the one-hour panel discussion explored federal barriers and opportunities in preserving the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in New Jersey under Governor Murphy's leadership, expanding the state's Medicinal Marijuana Program and eradicating the opioid crisis. Reporter Lilo Stainton moderated the panel, attended by Capital Health System CEO Al Maghazeh and about 75 health care officials.

### ACA

Too many New Jerseyans go without the basic right of healthcare that is often taken for granted. Sens. Booker and Menendez said they were impressed with how New Jersey is defending the ACA in light of federal attacks. In May, to preserve a critical piece of the ACA, Gov. Murphy signed legislation requiring all New Jerseyans who don't have health coverage to buy a policy or pay a fee at tax time. This made New Jersey the first post-Trump state to create an individual mandate. The fees collected will go into a fund that will help pay the claims of people who are catastrophically ill so rates will not rise dramatically.

More insured residents also mean less of a strain on the state's healthcare facilities to provide charity care to the uninsured.

### Medicinal Marijuana

Medicinal marijuana research is limited because the federal Drug Enforcement Agency still classifies marijuana as a Category 1 illegal substance with no medicinal value. Commissioner Elnahal thanked Sen. Booker for introducing the Marijuana Justice Act to remove marijuana from the list of controlled substances, which would expand research opportunities.

"We clearly need the federal government to stand down and allow the states to ultimately operate" medicinal marijuana programs, Sen. Booker said.

Before the end of the year, the Department is on track to double the number of patients in the Medicinal Marijuana Program. About 27,500 are currently enrolled in the program, including 9,100 with some form of chronic pain, anxiety, migraines or Tourette's Syndrome – the five new medical conditions added in March.

As the number of patients grows by about 100 a week, the Department is working with the six existing Alternative Treatment Centers to add satellite locations, and an application is available to add six additional facilities.

Through a series of lectures that kicked off in May at teaching hospitals and medical schools, Commissioner Elnahal is hoping to erase stigma among doctors and medical professionals, encourage more physicians to join the program and underscore studies that have shown promising results from marijuana as a treatment for certain conditions. One promising use for medicinal marijuana is as an alternative to opioids. Studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between the availability of medical marijuana and the reduction of opioid prescriptions.



*U.S. Senators Cory Booker, second from left, and Bob Menendez, second from right, listen as Commissioner Elnahal answers a question at the Health Care Forum in Hopewell on August 6. At right is Lilo Stainton of NJ Spotlight, who moderated the forum.*

## Commissioner Elnahal Visits County Health Departments to Hear About Best Practices Around the State



*Commissioner Elnahal, center, and Department senior staff visited the Ocean County Health Department on July 17. See additional photos from the Commissioner's visits to local health departments on [his Twitter feed at: https://twitter.com/sherefeelnahal](https://twitter.com/sherefeelnahal)*

Since July, Commissioner Elnahal has visited with county and local health officials in 15 of New Jersey's 21 counties, with meetings in the remaining counties underway. This has provided opportunities for meaningful dialogue with Health Officers and local elected officials across the state to learn more about their public health services, best practices and community health concerns.

The robust visitation schedule began the week of July 8 in the southern part of the state. The Commissioner and staff first visited Salem County Department of Health and Human Services' health officials, as well as County freeholders, to discuss meeting the needs of their growing elderly population and ensuring access to health services locally. In Gloucester County, the Commissioner and his team learned about the expansion of the Department of Health and Human Services' Access to Reproductive Care and HIV Services (ARCH) Program and its leadership of an Addictions Task Force with the prosecutor's office, public health representatives, law enforcement and individuals in recovery to increase awareness and support addiction prevention, treatment and recovery.

During the week of July 15, the Commissioner and his team visited Ocean, Atlantic, Cumberland and Cape May Counties' elected, appointed and career county health officials. Ocean County described their best practices to support and protect children by encouraging breastfeeding and expanding lead screening. Atlantic County had a model program for the use of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders (SUDs) in jails. The Commissioner would like to see similar initiatives in every county. Initiatives to help those with SUDs also came up when

the Commissioner met with Cumberland County, which is very focused on combatting addiction and preventing crime by engaging at-risk youth. Cape May County outlined many preventive health efforts: from reducing the burden of influenza by vaccinating more than 3,000 residents last year to partnering with local dermatologists to provide free skin cancer screenings.

Later in July, the team met with the Burlington County Health Department to gain insight on the scope of public health activities they perform, including their innovative use of text messaging to remind patients of their follow up appointments at their sexually transmitted diseases (STD) clinic. Their Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers are creatively deployed throughout the year to address not only emergencies, but to support flu vaccination, skin cancer screening and the needs of the homeless population.

In early August, the tour of health departments continued with a visit to Passaic County where health departments shared their efforts to ensure that grocery stores stock healthy food for residents. They also showcased a sample of outdoor signage used in parks and natural areas to encourage residents to prevent tick-borne disease. The Commissioner learned how Union County is exploring innovative ways to address the opioid epidemic, such as training housing counselors in addictions and recovery, expanding needle exchange programs and working to increase the number of individuals with drug-related offenses that enter drug treatment.

When visiting with Essex County health officials, the Commissioner and team learned about the successes of their methadone maintenance program for decreasing overdose deaths. Drug treatment programs have proven invaluable for reducing the transmission of HIV as well. Of note, Bloomfield Township's Health Department was the first to receive public health accreditation in the State.

Middlesex County health officials described their focus on the opioid epidemic—expanding the use of MAT within the correctional system, continuing hospital-based peer recovery coaching and outreaching to its communities through a youth drug awareness course for parents.

During the visit with Hunterdon County health officials, the Commissioner learned about their best practices to ensure pregnant women's transport to prenatal visits. To reduce maternal and infant mortality, the county dedicates van transportation and when necessary utilizes drivers to assist residents who need out of county maternal-fetal medicine consults. The Hunterdon County Division of Health also locally discovered a rare tick species in North America, the Longhorned tick. This tick is a significant pest of livestock, and they have quickly initiated eradication efforts on a residential property in the county.

Protecting residents from tick-borne illness was also a focus of a discussion when visiting Morris County health officials. They have one of the highest incidences of Lyme disease in the state and are taking aggressive measures to combat the spread of tick-borne illness. Morris County also has a model coordination program for addressing active cases of tuberculosis across its municipalities.

When visiting Somerset County, health officials shared a commitment to a health in all policies approach through its Healthier Somerset Coalition, which includes businesses, faith-based and nonprofit organizations, the healthcare industry, education representatives and local government. The mission of this group is to improve health and the wellbeing of those who live and work in the county—with a focus on behavioral health, obesity, chronic disease and access to care.

Near the end of August, the team met with health officials in Camden County. County leaders and local health have established an Addictions Awareness Task Force and sponsored support group programs for the community, which has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. There is also a 2nd Chance Program in jails to prevent and treat SUDs among inmates. Camden County Health Department, which has received public health accreditation, remains at the forefront of other public health issues by working to establish outdoor smoke-free policies and hosting an annual Women's Health Conference.

Throughout the visits with health departments, many promising ideas and best practices were presented. The Commissioner appreciates the time dedicated to the visits for thoughtful exchange, which allows a clearer understanding of public health capacity and capability throughout the State. At the completion of these visits, the Department will develop a post-visit report for best practice sharing and to champion and bolster local efforts to improve health.



## Save the Date: NJ Suicide Prevention Conference September 13

Please save the date! The New Jersey Department of Health, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)'s annual Suicide Prevention Conference will be held on Sept. 13 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at the War Memorial in Trenton. This year's conference, Suicide Prevention, A Community Effort – "Working Together to Prevent Suicide," will provide a forum to continue our shared efforts to reduce suicide deaths and attempts, and focus on prevention strategies.

Health Commissioner Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson and Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer will kick off the program with a panel discussion on their respective Department's commitment to suicide prevention.

Participants will hear the latest New Jersey suicide statistics as well as the critical role of health care in suicide prevention from Dr. Michael Hogan, healthcare consultant and clinical professor of the Psychiatry Department at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland; and the critical role communities play in effectively responding to the public health problem of suicide from Dr. Richard McKeon, Chief of the Suicide Prevention Branch in the Division of Prevention, Traumatic Stress and Special Programs at the Center for Mental Health Services within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Breakout sessions will focus on issues students often face in the transition from elementary school through college, skills in dealing with suicidal ideations, coping mechanisms for survivors and families, and strategies for vulnerable populations.

Valerie Mielke, DMHAS Assistant Commissioner, will present former Governor Richard Codey with a Mental Health Advocacy Award for his work in advocating for the needs of the mentally ill, fighting mental illness stigma and bringing to light the issue of post-partum depression, and, through the Codey Fund for Mental Health, reducing teenage suicide and depression throughout New Jersey.

Deborah Hartel, Deputy Commissioner of the Integrated Health Services, will deliver closing remarks.

This free event offers professional development certificates for educators, continuing education credits for social workers, public health professionals, licensed certified alcohol & drug Counselors, nurses, psychologists and physicians at no cost.

Register [here](#) and select a breakout session you wish to attend. Please rank your breakout session choices (1-5) based on your preference.

Follow along by searching hashtag #NJPreventsSuicide on social media.

## NEW JERSEY SUICIDE PREVENTION HOPELINE

855-NJHopeline  
855-654-6735  
[www.njhopeline.com](http://www.njhopeline.com)



## DOH, DOC Commissioners Tout Medication-Assisted Treatment for Inmates

### *Tour, roundtable feature participants in Atlantic County Jail program*

Touting the benefits of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) in reducing relapse, overdoses and recidivism among inmates with substance abuse disorder, Department of Health Commissioner (DOH) Shereef Elnahal and Department of Corrections (DOC) Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. on August 6 toured a Pleasantville treatment facility that delivers MAT to Atlantic County jail inmates and listened to success stories from the judge, warden and clients involved in the program.

The two officials toured the John Brooks Recovery Center (JBRC) and held a public roundtable that included Atlantic County Jail Warden David Kelsey, Superior Court Judge Mark Sandson, and JBRC leadership and focused on the need to spread evidence-based best practices to reduce the opioid epidemic among the general and incarcerated populations.

"The Murphy Administration is taking bold steps to integrate Medication-Assisted Treatment into multiple stages of one's journey through the criminal justice system," Commissioner Elnahal said. "Recognizing that opioid addiction is the root cause of a large portion of criminal behavior and recidivism, the Department of Health has partnered with the Department of Corrections and Administrative Office of the Courts to introduce an evidence-based therapy for opioid use disorder—Medication Assisted Treatment—beginning at the time of arrest.

"We are extremely pleased with the success of our Medication Assisted Treatment program for state incarcerated inmates," said Acting Commissioner Hicks. "Since the inception of the program in November 2017, the NJDOC has had approximately 100 inmates receiving MAT services per month. We believe that MAT, in conjunction with behavior therapy, is a beneficial resource for our inmates that will lead to successful reentry back into society."

On average, between 70-80% of those who are incarcerated have a substance use disorder, and in New Jersey, 80 percent of inmates with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) were under the influence when they committed their crime; and 75% of inmates with opioid-use disorder relapse within three months of release.



*Commissioner Elnahal, Deputy Commissioner Deborah Hartel, Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke, and JBRC CEO Alan Oberman listen as Dr. Herbert Kaldany, director of psychiatry and addiction services at the Department of Corrections, speaks during a tour of the facility.*

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## Community Outreach July-August 2018

**July 6** Commissioner Elnahal and State Public Health Veterinarian Colin Campbell visited the Save – A Friend to Homeless Animals in Montgomery to raise awareness about the dangers of [heat for animals](#) and provide tips on keeping pets safe and healthy.

**July 9** Commissioner Elnahal toured Curaleaf Alternative Treatment Center in Bellmawr.

**July 11** In two special grand rounds lecture held at Hackensack Meridian Health and St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center, the Commissioner spoke to medical students and staff about the New Jersey's [Medicinal Marijuana Program](#).

**July 12** During a tour of Saint Clare's Hospital in Denville, the Commissioner heard about their efforts to improve community wellness and behavioral health for surrounding residents.

**July 12** The Commissioner and Integrated Services Branch Deputy Commissioner Deb Hartel visited Zufall Health Center to see the care they provide to the uninsured and underinsured.

**July 14** Assistant Commissioner of Community Health Nashon Hornsby participated in the *I Walk Camden* event, which was hosted by Camden Mayor Frank Moran and Cooper's Ferry Partnership.

**July 16** As part of a tour at Morristown Medical Center, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Health Systems Marcela Maziarz discussed the shared priorities of value-based care to underserved populations, fighting the opioid epidemic and expanding access to behavioral health.

**July 18** Commissioner Elnahal moderated a panel discussion among hospitals CEO about the future of the healthcare system at the South Jersey Healthcare Forum for Business Leaders.

**July 20** Principal Deputy Commissioner Jackie Cornell presented NJ's health priorities for Maternal and Child Health at the Community of Care Consortium meeting.

**July 23** During a tour of Garden State Dispensary, an Alternative Treatment Center in Woodbridge, the Commissioner learned about their efforts to help patients manage their pain and health conditions.

**July 30** Commissioner Elnahal and Principal Deputy Commissioner Cornell welcomed grantees to the Foundations of Health Equity Training designed to increase health parity for all NJ residents.

**July 31** Principal Deputy Commissioner Cornell toured Harmony Dispensary, an Alternative Treatment Center in Secaucus.

**August 1** As part of a tour of the Cancer Institute of NJ, the Commissioner learned first- about the groundbreaking research being conducted and compassionate care being delivered there.

**August 9** About 800 individuals attended the Medicinal Marijuana Alternative Treatment Center [pre-application conference](#). Potential applicants got a step-by-step run through of how to file an application online, and Assistant Commissioner Jeff Brown outlined the timeline process, scoring of applications and frequently asked questions.

**August 13** The Commissioner, along with the First Lady and other Cabinet officials, delivered remarks at a workshop held for community health works and home visiting specialists. He spoke about the Administration's efforts to reduce black infant and maternal mortality.



*Lisa Asare, Assistant Commissioner of Family Health Services, and Commissioner Elnahal at the First Lady's workshop on August 13.*

## NJ Medicinal Marijuana Program Enrolls 30,000 Patients

New Jersey's ever-expanding Medicinal Marijuana Program reached a new milestone this week—serving 30,000 patients, almost half of whom have joined since the start of the Murphy administration.

These new faces who have joined New Jersey's Medicinal Marijuana Program over the past seven months illustrate the leaps the Murphy administration has taken to make it less restrictive and more receptive to residents who were suffering without this therapy.

By adding six new qualifying conditions and issuing a call for more alternative treatment centers, we are on the road to growing the program exponentially.

Of the 13,000 patients who have signed up since January, about 11,350 have one of the six new medical conditions added at the end of March: anxiety, migraines, Tourette's syndrome, chronic pain related to musculoskeletal disorders, and chronic visceral pain.

In July, the Murphy administration issued a call for up to six new alternative treatment centers—two each in the northern, central and southern part of the state. Applications are due Aug. 31.

About 800 interested applicants and representatives attended a mandatory pre-application conference hosted by the Department on Aug. 9 at the War Memorial in Trenton. Applicants got a step-by-step tutorial on how to file an application online, and Assistant Commissioner Jeff Brown outlined the timeline process, scoring of applications and common questions and answers. The [PowerPoint presentation](#) and full [video archive](#) of the discussion are available on the Department's [website](#).

## Commissioner Joins Booker, Menendez at Health Care Forum

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### Opioid Epidemic

The opioid epidemic continues to claim too many lives, and Gov. Murphy is taking strong action to address this public health crisis. He's investing \$100 million in a multi-agency, strategic, data-driven effort to combat the opioid epidemic.

St. Joseph's University Medical Center is leading the way in eradicating opioid dependency in New Jersey through its unique Alternatives to Opiates (ALTO) approach. About 2 percent of people leave the Emergency Department at St. Joseph's with an opioid prescription; the national average is 17 percent.

"This is something that takes every segment of our society to meet this challenge because it is a national crisis," Menendez said.

## DOH, DOC Commissioners Tout Medication-Assisted Treatment for Inmates

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According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, people released from incarceration are more than 120 times more likely to die from an opioid overdose death upon release than the general population.

"We have saved many lives through our ability to use this resource to start our participants on MAT in the Atlantic County Jail Facility, Superior Court Judge Mark Sandson said. "We are now able to place our participants in in-patient or outpatient treatment while stabilized on MAT. I am certain we have saved many lives and have saved our New Jersey citizens countless tax dollars in having this capacity, thus avoiding, in most cases, state prison sentences."

In fiscal year 2018, New Jersey increased the number of clients receiving MAT at disposition in drug court by 79%. Of those individuals, over 75% completed a full course of treatment, amounting to 57 more individuals than the year prior. Individuals receiving MAT completed treatment at a much higher rate than those who received other forms of treatment—only 61% for the latter category.

DOC has given \$1.7 million for MAT Medication Assisted Treatment programs to the following counties: Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, Salem, Somerset, Union, and Warren counties.

In addition, the Department of Health is working with the Office of the Attorney General to obtain funding for more Operation Helping Hand interventions at the time of arrest—bringing newly arrested individuals into treatment in the community. That program has prompted 84% of arrested individuals to accept treatment.

The Department of Health is also collaborating with the DOC to initiate MAT for more individuals who are incarcerated in state, county and municipal jails. Since January of 2018, 37 inmates in 10 jails across the state were able to start Medication Assisted Treatment in county and municipal jails.

DMHAS and DOC also are establishing three Intensive Recovery Support Teams (IRTS) for a group of 200 prison inmates on MAT and another group of 400 not on MAT but who require SUD services. The IRTS teams will connect with these inmates ready to be released and link them in the community with recovery services necessary to support wellness and successful community integration. They will help with such issues as SUD treatment adherence, employment and employment advocacy, housing, health and opportunities and skills to enhance the individual's involvement in meaningful life activities. The IRTS's will use a critical time intervention time limited approach to case management.

The Murphy administration also is integrating MAT into the state parole board, as part of conditions at the time of early release.

"In this population, a striking 91 percent of individuals receiving the MAT course complete treatment successfully, vs. only 50% who receive other forms of treatment (detoxification, ambulatory withdrawal management, etc.)," Elnahal said. "These statistics are powerful testimony to the value of MAT."

Other participants in the roundtable included: Dr. Herbert Kaldany, the state Department of Corrections' Director of Psychiatry and Addiction Services, DOH Integrated Services Branch Deputy Commissioner Deborah Hartel, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke, John Brooks Recovery Center Chief Executive Officer Alan Oberman, Atlantic County Freeholder Chairman Frank Formica, JBRC Associate Director of Outpatient Services Carolann Caviola, JBRC Inmate Services Supervisor Jane Calabrese, and JBRC Executive Director of Operations Mike Santillo.

Clients of the program told Elnahal that it saved their lives and kept them on the road to recovery.

## Department Promotes Tick Awareness

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The Department invites you to partner with us to amplify and share the tick prevention campaign messaging in your jurisdictions. You can do so by:

- Co-branding and/or sharing the prevention materials available to download [here](#). Use the digital ad on your website and/or display the [poster](#) in your clinic, lobby, waiting room or other high-trafficked areas.
- Promote our social media campaign. Use #TargetTicksNJ on your agency's social media pages to emphasize the importance of avoiding tick bites. Follow New Jersey Health Commissioner Elnahal on [Twitter](#). Follow the New Jersey Department of Health on [Twitter](#) @njdeptofhealth, [Facebook](#) /njdeptofhealth, [Instagram](#) @njdeptofhealth and [Snapchat](#) @njdoh.
- Connect community members to our webpage. Share this [NJDOH Lyme Disease link](#) at so your community can access valuable educational materials and resources.

We look forward to you joining us in this important public health campaign!



## 2nd Annual College Flu Challenge

The Department of Health is teaming up with colleges and universities for the second annual College and University Flu Challenge to encourage young adults to [get vaccinated against the flu](#). This initiative facilitates friendly competition between institutions with the goal of promoting flu awareness and vaccination among students across the state.

In New Jersey and across the nation, fewer than one-third of young adults get vaccinated against the flu each year. That number can be even lower for college campuses. In addition, the habits and lifestyles of students living on campus can increase their vulnerability to becoming infected with and spreading the flu. On average, college students with the flu can experience eight or more days of illness. Preventing the flu can reduce time away from class, limit expenses that may arise because of flu illness, and further reduce the spread of the disease.

Each participating school will develop and implement a unique influenza campaign to best suit the needs of the student body. The Department will monitor vaccination coverage rates through a short student self-reported electronic survey, supply technical updates, and provide a resource manual to assist in developing ideas. By participating in the 2018-19 College Flu Challenge, each school will receive educational resources, a certificate of participation, and will be eligible for the New Jersey Influenza Honor Roll.

The challenge is set to begin in September and will continue through February 2019. Please join us in encouraging young adults across New Jersey to get protected against the flu.

## New Jersey Celebrates National Health Center Week 2018

For more than 50 years, community health centers have served as an integral part of the health delivery system providing primary care and comprehensive services to more than 27 million patients throughout the country.

As part of National Health Center Week (NHCW), August 12-18, Department staff attended a series of events to emphasize the importance of health centers and honor the extraordinary work of health center staff.

On Tuesday, Aug. 14, Commissioner Elnahal joined the Newark Community Health Center along with Department of Education Commissioner Lamont O. Repollet Ed.D and DOH's Assistant Commissioner Nashon Hornsby for a health fair and to encourage parents to get the age appropriate back-to-school vaccinations for their children before the school year starts.

Deputy Commissioner Deborah Hartel and Assistant Commissioner Nashon Hornsby also attended the New Jersey Primary Care Association's annual NHCW kick-off event at North Hudson Community Action in Passaic alongside US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Regional Director Dr. Anthony Ferreri.

New Jersey has 24 community health centers — at least one in every county — with more than 119 across the state serving as critical health care safety nets for residents. The Department provides more than \$30 million to support their care of uninsured and underinsured residents.

During NHCW, HHS announced \$2 million in Quality Improvement Awards to 23 [federally qualified health centers \(FQHCs\)](#) in New Jersey to continue to improve quality, efficiency, and the value of health care delivery in the communities they serve.

In 2017, NJ FQHCs served more than 530,000 individual patients and over 1.8 million patient visits were provided.

Principal Deputy Commissioner Jackie Cornell and Assistant Commissioner of HIV, STD and TB Services Christopher Menschner joined the Visiting Nurse Association on Aug. 9 for the grand opening of the new LGBTQ Health Center in Asbury Park, the first of its kind in Monmouth County.

For the month of August, in conjunction with National Health Center Week, DOH's Public Health Innovators page highlighted the innovative work of some of New Jersey's Federally Qualified Health Centers.



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## New Jersey Breastfeeding Rates Improve

During National Breastfeeding Month (August), the Department of Health is highlighting New Jersey's continued improvement in breastfeeding rates and sharing personal stories from the Department's leadership team.

Earlier this month the CDC released its 2018 Breastfeeding Report Card to track the nation's progress on improving breastfeeding rates. New Jersey improved on 5 measures:

Ever breastfed increased from 82.0% to 82.8%

Breastfeeding at 6 months increased from 52.6% to 57.6%

Breastfeeding at 12 months increased from 30.2% to 36.1%

Exclusive breastfeeding through 6 months increased from 23.1% to 24.4%

The percent of live births occurring at Baby-Friendly facilities increased from 13.6% to 18.9%

During the month of August, the Department has been sharing stories from our Chief of Staff, Director of Communications, State Epidemiologist and others about the positive impact breastfeeding has made on their child lives. To view these stories, you can visit our social media pages: [Twitter @njdeptofhealth](#), [Facebook /njdeptofhealth](#), [Instagram @njdeptofhealth](#) or search #NBM18 on social media.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed for about the first 6 months with continued breastfeeding alongside introduction of complementary foods for at least 1 year.

The Department is committed to making it easier for new mothers to continue breastfeeding by providing breaks and private space to pump. Just this August, the Department opened a new dedicated lactation room, bringing the total rooms available to six.

The [New Jersey Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\) program provides breastfeeding promotion and support](#) to low-income women across the state that encourages and empowers them to breastfeed their infants. Women who exclusively breastfeed receive the largest WIC food package to support their own nutritional needs while nursing.



*This dedicated lactation room is the newest of six lactation rooms available to nursing mothers who work for the Department of Health.*

## Research Advances in Liver and Colorectal Cancers

Immunotherapy – in which treatments are designed to harness the power of the body's own immune system – for cancer has been an important focus as of late. At Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the state's only National

Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, physician scientists continue to explore and make advances in this area.



**Darren R. Carpizo, MD, PhD**, is the director of the Hepatobiliary Cancer Program and a surgical oncologist at Rutgers Cancer Institute. Specializing in the treatment of those particular cancers and other gastrointestinal malignancies, Dr. Carpizo also conducts clinical trials in novel cancer treatments including immunotherapies and is currently leading a clinical trial examining two new immunotherapies to treat colorectal cancer that has spread to the liver. According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer is the third most frequent cancer in men and women, and 50 percent of patients who have colorectal cancer go on to develop metastases to their liver. Carpizo shares more about the work:

“Surgery unfortunately is very ineffective for these patients. I was looking to design a clinical trial that would potentially improve survival in these patients and was quite encouraged when I saw some initial results of an anti-cancer vaccine called PANVAC several years ago that was examined here at Rutgers Cancer Institute. This vaccine has been engineered to make the patient's immune system recognize a protein on the surface of colorectal cancer allowing the immune system to attack the cancer.

“PANVAC has been improved by a company called Bavarian Nordic, and it is now called CV301. Nivolumab is a new immunotherapy drug that is currently approved for the treatment of metastatic melanoma and lung cancer. It has an effect of making the patient's immune system hyper-active. We feel that giving these two treatments together to patients following surgery to remove their colorectal cancer metastases may improve the effectiveness of surgery and prevent their cancer from coming back. If this is successful, this will be a major advancement in the field,” notes Carpizo, who is also an associate professor of medicine and pharmacology at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

*Carpizo's current research is supported by numerous grants and funders including the National Cancer Institute (R01-CA200800 and K08-CA172676), the Breast Cancer Research Foundation and the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network.*

**Cancer Matters is brought to you by Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.**



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