

[View this email in your browser](#)



NEWSLETTER | AUGUST 2026



New Jersey Announces \$83 Million in Rural Health Grants and Launches New Program Website

Governor Mikie Sherrill announced the [first round of grant awards](#) through New Jersey's Rural Health Transformation Program (NJRHT), investing \$83 million in projects that aim to strengthen health care access and improve health

outcomes for residents living in rural communities across the state. Residents and stakeholders can also follow the program's investments and progress through a new [New Jersey Rural Health Transformation Program website](#).

The awards represent the first investments made through New Jersey's five-year Rural Health Transformation Program, a federally funded initiative designed to improve health care infrastructure, expand access to care, strengthen the health care workforce, and support innovative approaches to prevention and chronic disease management in rural communities.

“Every New Jersey resident deserves access to quality healthcare, regardless of where they live,” **Governor Sherrill said**. “These grants will help strengthen hospitals, community health providers, and the healthcare workforce that families rely on every day. While these funds do not make up for a federal government that is gutting funding for healthcare, by investing in innovative, community-driven solutions, we are taking a healthier and more affordable future for New Jersey into our own hands.”

The awards support projects across NJRHT's five priority areas:

- Workforce: Recruiting, training, and retaining clinical and non-clinical health care professionals;
- Infrastructure: Strengthening hospitals, primary care providers, and other essential health care facilities;
- Technology: Expanding the use of health technology and innovative care delivery models;
- Prevention: Improving community health through prevention-focused initiatives; and

- Chronic Disease: Supporting programs that improve the management of chronic health conditions.

“These investments are about more than funding individual projects,” **Commissioner Stephen Cha said.** “They are about transforming how healthcare is delivered in rural New Jersey. We are investing in stronger healthcare systems, a more resilient workforce, and innovative models of care that will improve access and affordability for residents today while building lasting capacity for the future.”

“In order to make good health possible for everyone, we have to identify the challenges facing distinct populations and craft innovative solutions to meet their health needs,” **Health Commissioner Dr. Raynard E. Washington said.** “These investments will help strengthen the overall health of rural New Jersey communities and move us closer to our goal of making New Jersey the healthiest state in the union.”

While New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation, approximately one in 10 New Jerseyans lives in rural communities. Rural communities are more likely to experience health care workforce shortages, hospital maternity unit closures, higher rates of substance use-related health impacts, and lower rates of annual pediatric well visits.

To help communities, health care providers, partners, and residents stay informed as this work moves forward, the New Jersey Department of Human Services and the New Jersey Department of Health have launched a new website for the Rural Health Transformation Program.

The website provides a central resource to learn about the program, including what qualifies as rural in New Jersey, who is eligible for the program, and the initiatives and investments supporting rural health transformation. Visitors can track the program's progress throughout its five-year funding period, find answers to frequently asked questions, and connect with the Rural Health Transformation Program team.

At a glance, the program includes:

- \$147.25 million in Year One funding secured;
- A five-year program period from 2025 to 2030;
- 11 counties identified as rural health areas; and
- 1,026,026 rural residents across New Jersey.

The federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services provides funding for the Rural Health Transformation Program. The first round of grant awards, the launch of the new website, and the upcoming Year Two Outlook webinar build on significant progress during the program's first year and create new opportunities to strengthen health care in rural communities across New Jersey.

Read more about the grant announcement [HERE](#).

Visit the new website [HERE](#).

New Jersey Rural Health Transformation Program

Update on program goals and progress to date

August 24, 2026

This publication is funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$147,250,805.85, with 100 percent funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, CMS/HHS or the U.S. Government.



4. Path forward



Finalize submission:
New Jersey's Year 2 submission will be completed by August 31



Gather input:
Continue collecting stakeholder feedback to refine submission priorities



Questions or input?
Contact mahs.njrht@dhs.nj.gov
For more information:
nj.gov/rural-health-transformation



Thanks to everyone who attended the Aug. 24 webinar hosted by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health on the Rural Health Transformation Program's Year Two Outlook.



New Jersey Human Services Announces \$16.45M Investment to Open Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Centers as Part of State's 988 Continuum of Care

New Jersey Human Services announced \$16.45 million in funding to support the implementation of Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Centers (CRSCs), strengthening New Jersey's behavioral health crisis response system and expanding the continuum of care available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

The investment includes \$14.95 million in state funding and \$1.5 million in federal Mental Health Block Grant funding from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

CRSCs are a critical component of a comprehensive crisis care system, providing individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis with an alternative to emergency departments or law enforcement when a hospital or other higher level of care is unnecessary. The centers are designed to offer immediate

assessment, stabilization, treatment, and connection to ongoing behavioral health services in a welcoming, community-based setting.

“I applaud Commissioner Cha and the Department of Human Services for enabling crisis stabilization to ensure that individuals facing a mental health crisis will have another layer of help,” **said Governor Mikie Sherrill**. “The 988 system of care ensures that every New Jerseyan knows that when they reach out in a moment of need, someone will be there to answer—and facilitate the care and support that they deserve.”

“[988](#) is more than a phone number,” **Commissioner Stephen Cha said**. “It is the front door to a behavioral health crisis system that must have somewhere to take people when they reach out for help or for people to walk-in without an appointment when they need help. This \$16.45 million investment will help New Jersey build out that system and give people experiencing a crisis access to the right care, in the right setting, at the right time. We are committed to making sure that calling 988 leads to meaningful support and a path toward recovery.”

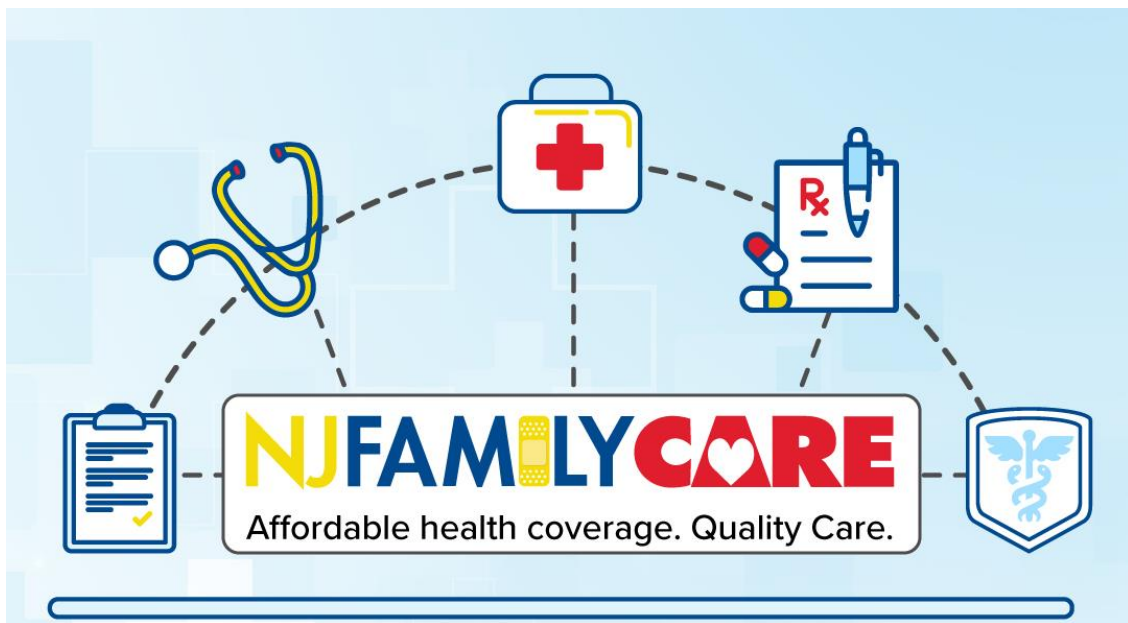
“This funding allows us to take another significant step toward strengthening New Jersey’s crisis response system that meets people where they are,” **Deputy Commissioner for Health Services Valerie Mielke said**. “Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Centers will provide people with immediate, specialized behavioral health care while helping reduce unnecessary emergency department visits and other interventions that may not be appropriate for someone experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. These centers are an essential part of the continuum that we are building through 988.”

“People experiencing a behavioral health crisis deserve an immediate response that recognizes their needs and treats them with dignity,” **[Division of Mental](#)**

Health and Addiction Services Assistant Commissioner David Helfand

said. “Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Centers give us the opportunity to move toward a system where people can receive care in a setting specifically designed for crisis stabilization. This investment represents an important step forward for New Jersey and for the individuals and families who rely on our behavioral health system.”

Read more [HERE](#).



New Jersey Calls on CMS to Simplify Medicaid Community Engagement Requirements to Protect Health Coverage

The New Jersey Department of Human Services has submitted comments to

the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) urging changes to the federal interim final rule implementing new Medicaid community engagement requirements imposed under H.R. 1.

The Department's [comments](#) identify significant operational and administrative challenges that could unnecessarily [jeopardize health coverage](#) for eligible New Jerseyans and create substantial implementation burdens for states.

The [Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services](#) (DMAHS), which administers [NJ FamilyCare](#), encourages CMS to adopt policies that are practical to administer, minimize unnecessary paperwork, and protect access to health care for eligible residents.

“I’ve advocated for repeal of the law that imposes these community engagement requirements, but we will follow the law and New Jersey is committed to implementing federal requirements with fidelity while doing everything possible to ensure eligible residents maintain the health coverage they depend on,” **Commissioner Stephen Cha said.** “Our comments reflect months of careful analysis by our policy, operations, and technology teams. We are asking CMS to provide states with the flexibility and clarity needed to implement these requirements in a way that minimizes unnecessary administrative barriers and helps eligible people stay connected to care.”

“Implementing these requirements requires significant changes to eligibility systems, business processes, staff training, and member communications,” **Deputy Commissioner for Health Services Valerie Mielke said.** “Our recommendations focus on creating an implementation framework that is operationally feasible while ensuring that eligible individuals are not denied or lose coverage because of unnecessary administrative complexity.”

“New Jersey has worked proactively to prepare for these changes, but, in order to minimize disruptions to members’ care, the federal government should rapidly clarify ambiguous provisions in the rule, and eliminate burdensome requirements that go beyond the intent of the law,” **DMAHS Assistant Commissioner Gregory Woods said.** “This will reduce administrative costs for states and more importantly reduce the number of eligible members who lose access to Medicaid, despite remaining eligible.”

Read more [HERE](#).

Learn More [HERE](#).



Human Services Announces Advisory Committee to Improve Mental Health Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing New Jerseyans

Commissioner Stephen Cha announced the formation of the Inclusive Mental Health Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee and the appointment of its inaugural members. Established by [P.L.2025, c.177](#), the Advisory Committee will help strengthen access to culturally affirmative and linguistically appropriate mental health services for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals throughout New Jersey.

The Advisory Committee will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the availability of mental health services for Deaf and hard of hearing New Jerseyans, identify workforce and service gaps, evaluate barriers to care, and develop recommendations to improve access to high-quality, culturally responsive behavioral health services across the state.

"Every New Jerseyan deserves equitable access to quality mental health care," **Commissioner Cha said**. "The formation of this Advisory Committee represents an important step toward ensuring that Deaf and hard of hearing residents can access services that recognize and respect their communication needs, language preferences, and lived experiences. The expertise and perspectives of these members will help guide meaningful improvements to our behavioral health system."

"Our behavioral health system is strongest when it is accessible to everyone," **said Deputy Commissioner for Health Services Valerie Mielke**. "This Advisory Committee brings together professionals, advocates, educators, interpreters, and individuals with lived experience to help us better understand where gaps exist and how we can build a more responsive mental health system for Deaf and hard of hearing New Jerseyans."

"This Advisory Committee is an important step toward addressing the significant health disparities this community faces," **said Deputy Commissioner for Disability and Aging Services Kaylee McGuire**. "By listening to individuals with lived experience, we can create a mental health system that recognizes these unique needs and responds with the specialized services that people deserve."

"Communication access is fundamental to effective mental health care," **said [Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) Executive Director Elizabeth Hill**. "When people can communicate directly with providers who understand their language and culture, they are better able to build trust, participate in treatment, and achieve positive outcomes. This Advisory Committee will play an important role in identifying opportunities to strengthen services and ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing New Jerseyans have equitable access to the behavioral health care they deserve."

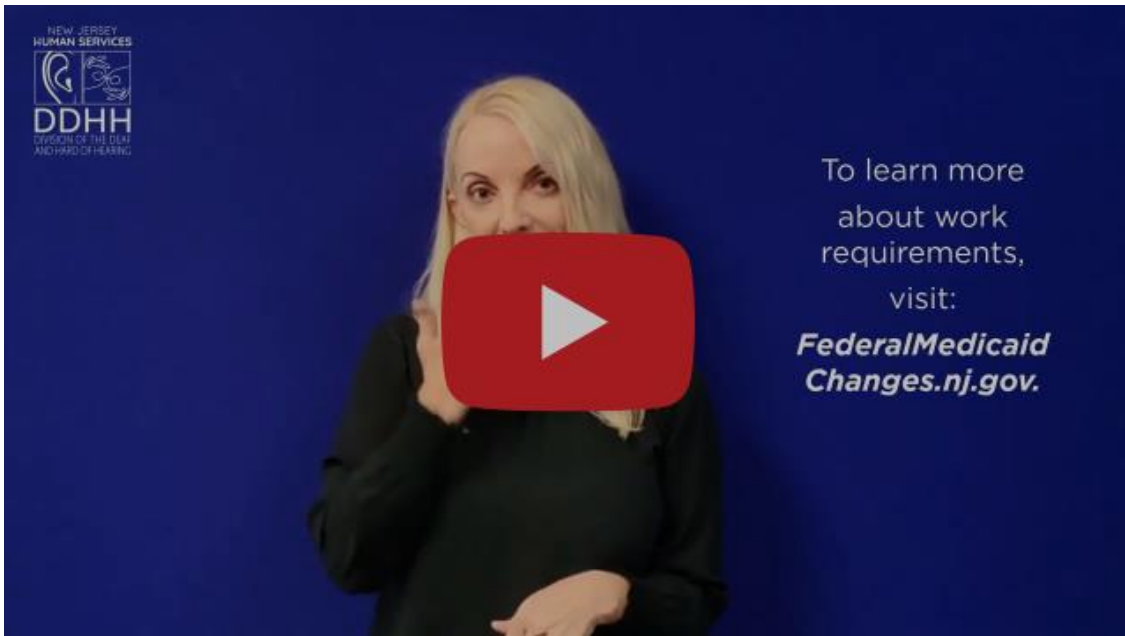
Learn more [HERE](#).

**Information About Federal Medicaid Changes in
American Sign Language (ASL)**



New federal rules will change eligibility for [some non-citizen NJ FamilyCare members](#) beginning October 1. [Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

Executive Director Elizabeth Hill is sharing an American Sign Language video with important information about what these changes mean and where to get help.



New federal rules will soon [change eligibility requirements](#) for some [NJ FamilyCare](#) members. [Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) Executive Director Elizabeth Hill is sharing an American Sign Language video with important information about what these changes mean.



Deputy Commissioner McGuire Joins Roundtable Discussion on Alzheimer's hosted by Congressman Gottheimer

Deputy Commissioner for Aging and Disability Services Kaylee McGuire joined a roundtable on Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia hosted by Congressman Josh Gottheimer at the Waldwick Public Library, bringing together medical experts, patients, caregivers, advocates, and local leaders to discuss the ongoing challenges facing New Jersey families affected by Alzheimer's, the latest research and treatments, and the fight to combat the disease.

The roundtable discussion focused on the everyday realities facing Jersey families affected by Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia and is a progressive disease of the brain. Today, an estimated 7.4 million Americans aged 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's, or about one in nine seniors, and nearly two-thirds of them are women.

“This isn’t an abstract issue for me,” **Congressman Gottheimer said.** “Like so many of you, I’ve had close friends and family members who’ve struggled with this disease, and once you’ve watched it up close, it changes something in you. For decades, an Alzheimer’s diagnosis felt like a hopeless one. That is finally starting to change, but only if we keep the research funded, keep training our doctors, and keep fighting to make sure new breakthroughs actually reach the people who need them. I want to thank our medical experts, advocates, patients, caregivers, and local leaders who joined me this morning.”

“Alzheimer’s touches every part of a family’s life, and no one should have to navigate its challenges alone,” **Deputy Commissioner McGuire said.** “I thank Congressman Gottheimer for bringing people together for this important conversation and for his continued leadership on issues affecting family caregivers. These conversations give us an opportunity to listen to families, learn from their experiences, and work together on solutions that make a real difference. At New Jersey Human Services, we are committed to helping those living with Alzheimer’s and related dementias remain as independent and connected to their communities as possible, while helping caregivers get the support and resources they need.”

Read more [HERE](#).



NEW JERSEY'S 11TH ANNUAL
**SUICIDE PREVENTION
CONFERENCE**
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10TH, 2026

**Free | All-Day Virtual Event | Keynote Speakers
Breakout Sessions | CME & CE credits available**

All are welcome to join

HAPPENING SEPT. 10: Join New Jersey Human Services, [NJ Department of Health](#) and [NJ Department of Children and Families](#) for the [11th Annual Suicide Prevention Conference](#) "**Building the Bridges of Hope: Upstream Approaches to Suicide Prevention.**" This event is free, virtual and all are welcome to join.

Register [HERE](#).

TURNING THE TIDE THROUGH INNOVATION, ACTION, AND RECOVERY

NJ DHS ANNUAL OPIOID SUMMIT

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

**Free | All-Day Virtual Event | Keynotes | Panels |
Workshops Continuing Education Credits
available based on board approvals**

Funding for this conference is made possible by SAMHSA. The views expressed in written conference materials or publications and by speakers and moderators do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

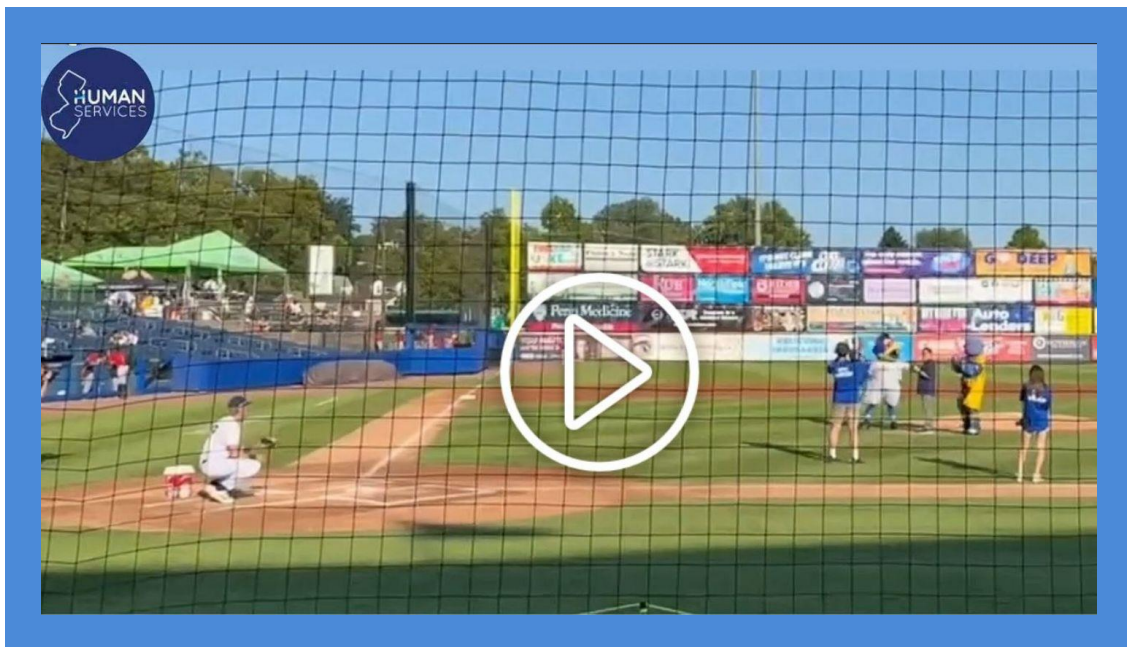


Save the date! Join us for our **Annual Opioid Summit** on Wednesday, Sept. 23. This free, all-day virtual event features keynotes, panels and workshops.

CE credits available based on board approvals.

Register [HERE](#).





New Jersey Human Services participated in [Addiction Awareness Night](#) at the Trenton Thunder. This event featured free life-saving naloxone, drug disposal pouches and first pitch from Commissioner Stephen Cha.

Call **844-ReachNJ** for addiction treatment help and visit <https://StopOverdoses.nj.gov> to find where you can get free naloxone.



Deputy Commissioner for Social Services Michael J. Wilson joined Congressman Herb Conaway for an Aug. 26 roundtable discussion of child hunger. Along with panelists from the [Office of the Food Security Advocate](#), [Hunger Free New Jersey](#), and the New Jersey Education Association, they discussed school meals, the [SNAP](#) program, and the [cuts mandated by H.R. 1](#).

Human Services Public Policy Specialist Gopna Shekaran (right) and Legislative Liaison Sarah McClure (left) also attended.

Disability Mortality and Abuse Prevention Advisory Committee Holds First Meeting

The [Disability Mortality and Abuse Prevention Advisory Committee](#) (DMAPAC) held its inaugural meeting on Aug. 21. The committee brings together self-advocates, family members, providers, advocacy and protection agencies, and state representatives to help strengthen New Jersey's response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and mortality involving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

DMAPAC will continue meeting throughout the summer and fall to complete training and finalize its case review process, with its first case reviews anticipated before the end of the year.



Best wishes to [Human Services Police](#) Chief Brian Lee on his retirement. His dedicated leadership and service to this vital agency will be greatly missed.



Congratulations to Sherri Eure-Washington, Director of Employee Relations, on her retirement. Thank you, Sherri, for your dedication, leadership, and years of service. We wish you all the best in this exciting new chapter!



The [Human Services Office of Emergency Management](#) did a Pathways to Preparedness Presentation in Hamilton. Attendees were provided with materials and learned about how to be prepared for an emergency or disaster. The training is free, and the Emergency Management Team goes around the State to deliver training to those interested.

To get more info about these trainings, email: eocesf6@njsp.gov.



Deputy Commissioner for Health Services Valerie Mielke joined Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Raynard E. Washington, Hamilton Mayor Jeffrey Martin, and Recovery Advocates Board Chair Denise Lovill in remembering Mercer County residents lost to overdose at the annual Prevention Council of Mercer County Overdose Awareness event.



Deputy Commissioner Kaylee McGuire, Office of Consumer Directed Services
 Director Rebecca Thomas and Senior Policy Advisor Jack Teters
 presented at the Advancing States HCBS Conference, sharing how New
 Jersey is boosting home- and community-based services via self-direction,
 age-friendly planning, and provider integrity.



[DHS' Office of Emergency Management](#) held its annual Mass Care Coordination Group meeting at the Red Cross facility in Tinton Falls. The meeting facilitated discussion on response activities associated with the State Emergency Operations Plan and allowed an active information exchange among all partners.



New Jersey Human Services joined the [Department of State](#) at their NJ Faith Action Center Freedom School Day Event. Our Outreach Team staffed a table filled with resources and information for attendees.



Governor's August Proclamations



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
Proclamation.

WHEREAS, drug overdoses have been the number one cause of accidental deaths in New Jersey, surpassing motor vehicle crashes, falls, homicides, and suicides; and

WHEREAS, addiction is a health condition and the discrimination associated with addiction must be addressed so that no one is stigmatized because of their health condition and needs getting support as a result; and

WHEREAS, recent declines in overdose deaths inspire hope, for too many people – more than 4 every day – still lose their lives to drug overdose in New Jersey, and the majority of these involve the highly potent opioid fentanyl or one of its analogs, and are increasingly complicated by the presence of xylazine, methamphetamine and other substances; and

WHEREAS, people who use drugs, family members, health care practitioners, and others can save lives by learning about the signs of an overdose and how to administer naloxone and how to use of rescue breathing to deliver much-needed oxygen to the individual until medical help arrives; and

WHEREAS, obtaining naloxone, free and anonymously, through New Jersey's Naloxone 365 program in participating pharmacies (located at [Naloxone365.org](#)) and through community organizations and harm reduction agencies ([Naloxone365.org/harmreductionhelp](#)), where naloxone and other harm reduction services and supports are provided statewide;

WHEREAS, the overdose crisis in New Jersey and across the country is not only driven by drug supply, but also by psychological trauma, structural inequities, stigma, and feelings of despair and isolation; and

WHEREAS, there have been declines in the number of overdose deaths across NJ populations. Black New Jerseyans are still dying at twice the rate of White non-Hispanic residents, as well as overdose deaths are increasingly occurring in those 15 years and older; and

WHEREAS, continued efforts are needed to increase the availability of substance use treatment and medications for opioid use disorder, which can be accessed by calling 1-844-REACT-NJ for NJ's Rapid Response program that quickly links individuals with providers of medications for opioid use disorder; and

WHEREAS, families affected by overdose need compassion, along with assistance and emotional support from professional and peer resources, including NJ Counsel for Recovery (1-844-373-7373); and

WHEREAS, August 31st is recognized in communities around the world as a day to remember individuals lost to drug overdose and to support their families and loved ones, and to galvanize action towards ending preventable overdose deaths;

NOW, THEREFORE, I Mikie Sherrell, Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby proclaim:

AUGUST 31, 2026
AS
OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

in New Jersey.

GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this twenty-ninth day of July in the year five thousand two-thousand twenty-six, the two hundred fifty-first year of the Independence of the United States.


LT. GOVERNOR


GOVERNOR



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
Proclamation.

WHEREAS, the ability to travel is a fundamental human right, enabling individuals to work, connect, explore, and embrace the rich diversity of our world; and

WHEREAS, ensuring that all members of society can partake in the benefits of air travel, regardless of physical or cognitive abilities, aligns with the principles of industry and equal opportunity; and

WHEREAS, while significant advancements in technology, infrastructure, and policies have led to improved accessibility within the aviation industry, more work remains to be done to eliminate barriers to make air travel accessible to all; and

WHEREAS, celebrated each year on August 28, National Accessible Air Travel Day is dedicated to improving and advancing accessible air travel for individuals with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, by commemorating National Accessible Air Travel Day, we aim to raise awareness about the importance of accessible air travel, foster discussions on innovation and improvement, and inspire continued collaboration among stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, on this day, we recognize the journeys taken and the journeys yet to come, as we strive to make air travel an experience that empowers every individual to traverse the skies with safety, comfort, and dignity;

NOW, THEREFORE, I Mikie Sherrell, Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby proclaim:

AUGUST 20, 2026
AS
ACCESSIBLE AIR TRAVEL DAY

in New Jersey.

GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this twenty-ninth day of July in the year five thousand two-thousand twenty-six, the two hundred fifty-first year of the Independence of the United States.


LT. GOVERNOR


GOVERNOR

Overdose Awareness Day

Accessible Air Travel Day



INTERNATIONAL **OVERDOSE** AWARENESS



In recognition of August 31st being **International Overdose Awareness Day**, New Jersey Human Services is sharing a couple short videos featuring individuals whose lives have been deeply impacted by overdose.

Check them out [HERE](#).



WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY 2026



Kaylee McGuire
Deputy Commissioner
for Aging and
Disability Services



Valerie Mielke
Deputy Commissioner
for Health Services



Jade Bechelli
Chief of Staff



Dr. Laura Long
Deputy Chief of Staff



Johanna Calle
Director
Office of
New Americans



Dr. Bernice Davis
Executive Director
Commission for the Blind
and Visually Impaired



Lisa Gaffney
Assistant Commissioner
Human Resources



Elizabeth Hill
Executive Director
Division of the Deaf
and Hard of Hearing



Natasha Johnson
Assistant Commissioner
Division of
Family Development



Jacqueline Moskowitz
Interim Director
Division of
Disability Services



Dr. Tara Oakman
Chief Strategy and
Innovation Officer



Deborah Robinson
Director
Office of Program Integrity
and Accountability



Louise Rush
Assistant Commissioner
Division of
Aging Services

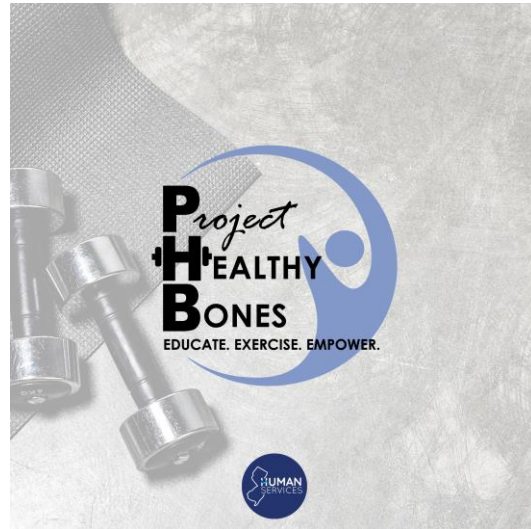
Women's Equality Day was August 26th. We take this time to honor and celebrate New Jersey Human Services women leaders working to ensure women have health and child care, child support, food assistance and more.

Visit:

njfamilycare.org, childcarenj.gov, njchildsupport.org, njhelps.gov,
nj.gov/connectingnj

In August, we highlighted bone health for older adults. Keep your bones healthy with **Project Healthy Bones**, an exercise and education program for people with, or at risk for osteoporosis. The 24-week program can help participants improve strength, balance and flexibility.

Learn more [HERE](#).



August was **Child Support Awareness Month**, a time to raise awareness about all the critical supports that help kids thrive. Visit [HERE](#) to learn more.



August 21st was **National Senior Citizens Day!**

Older residents and people with disabilities can save money without leaving home! The Division of Aging Services offers NJSave, an online application to help older adults and individual with disabilities save money on Medicare premiums, prescription costs, and other living expenses.

Check out our video to learn more, and visit [HERE](#) to apply today.

[NJ SNAP](#) | [NJ FAMILYCARE](#) | [NJSAVE](#) | [NJ HELPS](#)

FOLLOW US!

