



Alaska Medicaid Newsletter

Important information for you as an Alaska Medicaid Participant

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Depression

Understanding symptoms and tips for finding support

Depression may feel like something you may want to hide or even pretend is not there. It may be the last thing you want friends and family to be asking about. Giving your mental health attention may be a healthy path toward helping you get better.

Having conversations can be a way to help cut stigma around depression.

Here are some ideas to help you feel less anxious: **Going to a support group or engaging in a community activity.**

- **Stay active.** Exercising reduces stress, worry and feelings of depression. Alaska has a variety of summer activities. Things like, fishing, hiking, biking, kayaking, 4-wheeling, picnics, nature walks, berry picking, flower and food gathering, hunting, gardening, and bird watching.
- **Eat for a better mood.** What you eat can change how we feel physically, mentally, and emotionally. There are foods to help support a happy body and mind. Such foods can be found in your Alaskan backyard. Such as berries, salmon, rhubarb, blueberries, and salmon berries, potatoes, mushrooms, and vegetables
- **Meditate.** Meditation can help manage stress and improve our mental clarity.
- **Talk to a therapist.** People often think of therapy as a way to fix something that's broken. The truth is many people may see a provider to help manage stress and help to stay on top of their mental well-being.

Article courtesy of Optum partners at UnitedHealthcare; both companies are part of UnitedHealth Group



Traveling in Alaska with a Mental Health or Substance Use Disorder

Before you go...

Summer is here and travel can be used to re-center. It can be the most incredible experiences for those struggling with our mental health. Some days it can be hard to get out of bed. The idea of leaving the comfort of our apartment can seem impossible. But waking up in a new place can be very effective in breaking a downward spiral. Travel helps your brain focus on learning about a new place and less on your mood. Here are some tips that may they help you.

Make Sure You Have Enough Medication. Most of us go month-to-month on our meds. That can be a challenge for an extended trip that overlaps with your refill period. My pharmacy is also aware that I travel often and works with me to push up refill dates if needed.

Brief Travel Companions on Your Needs. Communication plan with travel companion. Solo travel is easier for me in many ways because I don't have to justify my emotional needs to anyone. However, when I travel with others, I try to discuss with them what I need (downtime, alone time, etc.) before we go.

Plan. For many of us with mood disorders, our anxiety worsens with the unknown—so having a plan can help with that. This doesn't mean I have every day planned out, but I go into a trip with at least a rough itinerary. I also try to alternate busy days with lighter days to build in some downtime for myself.

Prioritize Self-Care. I refuse to neglect my self-care when traveling. For me, emotional balance begins with a good night's sleep (at least eight hours, preferably more). I've accepted that this means I will rarely enjoy the nightlife in a new place, and I'm okay with that. If your self-care involves exercise, meditation or something else, structure that into your trip.

Know Your Triggers. Our illnesses (unfortunately) don't disappear because we're on vacation. Our triggers are there as well, so we need to continuously pay attention to situations that can activate them. Knowing what our triggers are ahead of time can help us avoid things that might set them off, but sometimes it still happens. What do we do then?

After You Return

Update Your Doctor and Therapist. I find it helpful to do a "debrief" with both my psychiatrist and therapist when I return from a trip. What situations did I handle well? What do I wish I would've handled differently? How did my meds work in a completely different environment? I believe that we learn by doing, and keeping the professionals we trust informed of our discoveries along the way is important.

Traveling with a mood disorder. NAMI. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2023, from <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/August-2018-/Traveling-with-a-Mood-Disorder>



If you're a participant or a participant advocate and have questions about Medicaid coverage, please call 800-225-8764, toll-free statewide Monday — Friday 8:00 a.m. — 6:00 p.m., Alaska Time. Free language assistance services are available to you.



PEER SUPPORT CORNER

How to Connect with PSS While Traveling

For this Peer Support Corner, we get to take a brief look at how we can prepare to start an adventure only Alaska can bring us.

Summer brings the excitement of fishing, camping, road-trips, and plane rides. However, some depression symptoms from “Winter Blues” may present themselves in our summer pursuits.

Thankfully there are ways to make sure we stay on top of our wellbeing so we can fully enjoy our plans!

A few things you can do before any activity include:

1. Check your medication, and supplements to cover your time away.
2. Check in with peers and support systems to ensure success in continued recovery.
 - a. If you can't find a group in person, you can sign up for one virtually through [NAMI](#)
3. Bring a copy of your WRAP plan or provide a copy to support.

With some self-compassion, and proactive planning, we can all make sure we do our best to enjoy all this summer can offer.

How Optum Care Management Can Help:

Optum offers advocacy and support to Medicaid participants with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders. Our Care Navigators are licensed clinicians and available 8am – 5pm, M-F. We can help you navigate the complex health care world by providing the following:

- Individual and family support
- Answers to benefit questions
- Medication and diagnosis education
- Support your discharge plan
- Appointment scheduling and reminders
- Referrals to Medicaid approved doctors or therapist
- Connect to community resources and services
- information about different types of treatment
- Help reach your health goals

We want to help build out consistent support after discharge, help you feel supported, support relapse prevention, establish crisis plan, and help you reconnect with your community.

Call to see if you are eligible: 800-225-8764

More Alaska support and meeting information:

[NAMI Family Support Group July 19th @ 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm AKDT](#)

[NAMI Connection Recovery & Peer-led support group July 27 @ 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm AKDT](#)

MAKE A CONNECTION

Find a Provider:

Participant Access Line: 800-225-8764 TDD/TTY dial 711 or visit alaska.optum.com and click *Find a Provider* on left side of the page.

Get Transportation:

For Medicaid travel benefits call the Medicaid Participant Helpline at 800-770-5650, Option 2.

Live & Work Well:

You can find information about maintaining your wellness and resources for crisis support.

Hotlines

[National Suicide Prevention Line](#)

9-8-8 988.alaska.gov

[Veterans Crisis Line](#)

800-273-8255 text 838255

[Careline](#)

877-266-4357 (HELP) or text 4help to 839863

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

800-799-7233

