



April 26, 2021

To: All WACOSA stakeholders

From: Steve Howard, Executive Director

Re: Update on WACOSA's services

Since it has been awhile since we last shared an update, we felt it a good idea to touch base again regarding WACOSA's current state of service delivery. The governor's emergency orders to control the spread of COVID-19 remain in place and appear to have had a positive impact on handling many issues pertaining to the current pandemic. However, these orders continue to have a significant impact on the services WACOSA provides, both in the maximum number of individuals we can serve and in the ways we provide service. That said we have experienced some increased flexibility in the governor's restrictions in recent weeks. These include:

- Allowing a total of 6 service hours per day per individual (includes transportation)
- Staff members have now been removed from being considered in total number of individuals that make up a Cohort

Unfortunately, under provisions of the Cohort model of service, those receiving services are required to remain with the same group of individuals for their entire day. To the best of our ability, this must also be observed during transportation to and from WACOSA's services. This continues to restrict our service flexibility by not allowing us to move people around in more efficient groups to take advantage of limited current staffing. The requirement for six feet of distancing between individuals is also hampering our efforts. Our MOHR state association representatives continue to negotiate with Minnesota's Department of Human Services (DHS) and the governor's office for greater leniency in these restrictions. For now, however, the current challenges remain in place.

We are aware of 85+ additional individuals have requested to return to WACOSA's services, in either full or part-time capacity. While this remains a substantial reduction in the total number of individuals served pre-COVID, we are nevertheless, working hard to accommodate as many individuals as possible.

Even when relaxing COVID-19 restrictions, WACOSA, as well as most Minnesota providers like WACOSA, are struggling to attract and retain qualified staff. Without a doubt, this is our most

significant hurdle in bringing individuals back for service at the current time. The inability to hire qualified staff is creating a bottleneck in service delivery to those we serve.

Recently, WACOSA leadership, in addition to the WACOSA Board of Directors, developed a plan to address these ongoing staffing needs and challenges. While we do not expect these changes to solve our short staffing concerns entirely, we anticipate this plan will help our current ability to alleviate the waiting list of individuals seeking a return to service.

As we anticipate some of the questions you may have, we have assembled a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) we have been receiving from many of our family members, referral sources etc. This list of FAQ's, along with our best response to each of these questions is attached.

While challenges persist, we are hopeful there will eventually be an end to the many restrictions that surround our concerns with COVID-19. Until that time, we continue to appreciate your patience. Even as we work to address the current staffing issues, we ask you keep in mind that returning to more normal daily living and services will take time. We will do our best to keep you posted as new information develops and ask you visit our website or Facebook pages for the latest information regarding WACOSA's services.

Thanks.