

## **The Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction Advisory Council (AODAAC) FY24 Priorities**

**Health and Human Services Committee Meeting – October 11, 2023**

**CHAIR: Elyse R. Grossman, J.D., Ph.D.**

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction Advisory Council (AODAAC) identified two major priorities for the year:

### ***1. To Examine Issues Facing Youth in our County and Provide Recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to Improve the Situation***

Research shows that childhood and early adolescence is a time when people are most likely to begin using drugs – including tobacco, alcohol, and illegal and prescription drugs. Youth who start using alcohol or other substances earlier in life have worse trajectories, greater consequences, and are more likely to develop an alcohol or substance use disorder when they are older. This means there needs to be a comprehensive county-wide strategy that both prevents and reduces youth substance use and provides treatment and recovery services for those who do use.

This year, the AODAAC will work to address the issue of vaping among youth in the County by understanding federal and state positions and actions on vaping; procuring and distributing resources related to vaping; partnering with other BCCs and organizations that are already working on this issue; and, eventually providing recommendations to the County Executive and the County Council on how to best address and improve this situation within our county.

We will work to encourage the funding of the Montgomery County Reconnect LGBTQIA+ Youth Mental Health Program and the creation and funding of a youth substance use treatment center to provide the full continuum of care, including residential and after care. We also urge county officials to work with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to develop a diversion program that is supportive versus punitive and where students can receive education, supervision, and help in addressing their substance use issues. This program should be a collaboration between the Montgomery County State's Attorney, the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD), the Department of Health and Human Services, Juvenile Services, and MCPS to provide diversion of both school and legal consequences by completing a combined program.

### ***2. To Follow the Development of Regulations and Policies Legalizing Adult Use of Cannabis in the County and Examine the Public Health, Legal, and Other Consequences of These Regulations and Policies.***

Cannabis use among both adults and youth has been steadily rising in the U.S. However, although Maryland (and several other states) have legalized adult use of cannabis, the long-term consequences of use and the impact of such use among youth is still not fully understood. This year, the AODAAC will continue to track the development of regulations and policies at the state and county level and work with others in the county and the state to compile research on the public health, legal, and other consequences of these regulations and policies to provide guidance for county officials moving forward.

In addition to these two major priorities, the AODAAC will also continue to work to address the issue of stigma in the county by potentially holding trainings; advocating for changes to stigmatizing language in official county laws, policies, and other consumer-facing information (e.g., documents and websites); and partnering with other organizations. We also strongly urge county officials to continue to monitor alcohol and other drug fatalities in the county and provide funding and incentives for and within the substance use domain. For example, additional staff are needed to provide prevention and harm reduction services in our county. Community-based peer-run organizations should be supported – perhaps by encouraging the addition of social workers to County recreation centers, embedding peers in other locations (e.g., ERs, jails, probation, with MCPD and MCFRS for overdose calls, etc.), and providing larger budgets to address staffing needs. We also encourage county officials to create incentives for staff retention within the mental health and substance use domains – e.g., student loan repayment programs, clear career tracks, childcare and housing assistance, etc. – an area filled with high stress jobs, low pay, and tremendous turn over. Lastly, the county will be receiving money from the JUUL settlement, the opioid settlement, and cannabis sales. We strongly encourage county officials to put some of this money towards preventing and treatment substance use and offer our expertise to help guide these funding decisions.