

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Reminds Pennsylvanians Experiencing Anxiety, Loneliness, Stress Amidst Holiday Season That They Are Not Alone, Encourages Farmers and Rural Communities to Use Support Resources and Networks

Harrisburg, PA – The Wolf Administration today shared resources for people struggling with anxiety, depression, loneliness, isolation, and other stressors this holiday season. The holidays can be both a time of joy and a period of stress for people, and people who are experiencing additional stressors and challenges because of the pandemic like farmers and agricultural communities may experience these feelings more acutely this year.

“2020 has been a difficult year for everyone in ways we’ve never experienced, and for individuals whose lives and livelihoods are strained, the collective challenges we face may be felt more acutely,” said Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller. “The holiday season and our family traditions will look different this year, but we do not have to be cut off from our support networks entirely. No matter what you are feeling this year, please know that you do not have to endure it alone. Talk to your loved ones, talk to your support network, and don’t be afraid to make a call to resources that exist to help.”

According to a January [study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, farmers are among the most likely to die by suicide compared to other occupations. The study also found that suicide rates overall had increased by 40 percent. Time demands, financial issues, fear of losing the farm (and therefore a home), and the uncertainty of both weather and the economy all contribute to the mental health strain on farmers. Because of the additional strain created by COVID-19, the Wolf Administration is encouraging all Pennsylvanians to pay special mind to their mental health and not endure anything they are feeling alone.

“Farmers and have unique stressors that could trigger feelings of anxiety or depression,” Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding said. “They often face economic uncertainty, vulnerability to weather and abrupt market changes. At the same time, they have responsibilities that they can’t easily take a break from. The family farm— the land, animals and incomes of business partners or employees are riding on the shoulders of the farmer, who is not fully in control of all the variables in this unpredictable industry. And rural agricultural communities tend to have limited access to mental health services, which can make it difficult for farm families to get support when they need mental health intervention. The effects of COVID-19 mitigation efforts have added to the usual load of stress.”

Mental Health

People who experience feelings of anxiety or depression may experience more distress during the holiday season than during normal times. Given the challenges we are all currently facing, all Pennsylvanians should take extra care to be mindful of their mental health and tend to their overall health and wellness during this time. Check in with yourself, be honest about how you are feeling to yourself and your support network, and if you need someone to talk to or a little extra support, help is available.

DHS' mental health support & referral helpline, Persevere PA, is available 24/7 and is a free resource staffed by skilled and compassionate caseworkers available to counsel Pennsylvanians struggling with anxiety and other challenging emotions. The helpline caseworkers can refer callers to community-based resources that can further help to meet individual needs. Pennsylvanians can contact Persevere PA at 1-855-284-2494. For TTY, dial 724-631-5600.

If you or someone you love is in crisis, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available by calling 1-800-273-8255. The hotline is staffed 24/7 by trained counselors who can offer free, confidential support. Spanish speakers who need immediate assistance can call 1-888-628-9454. Help can also be accessed through the Crisis Text Line by texting "PA" to 741-741.

A Plain Communities Helpline is also available through WellSpan at Philhaven at 717-989-8661. The Plain Communities Outpatient Clinic provides high quality mental health care that is sensitive to the values of the plain sect community.

Substance Use Disorder

The holidays may also be difficult for individuals with a substance use disorder or people in recovery, especially if they become stressed by changes to their schedule or daily routine, are not able to see their support network in-person, have strained or non-existent relationships with family members, or are faced with potential triggers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most dangerous time of the year for substance use and alcohol-related deaths are around the holiday months.

The Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs also maintains a toll-free helpline that connects callers looking for treatment options for themselves or a loved one to resources in their community. You can reach the Get Help Now helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). The helpline is available 24/7 – including on holidays. An anonymous chat service offering the same information to individuals who may not be comfortable speaking on the phone is also available at www.ddap.pa.gov.

Naloxone is still available to all Pennsylvanians through Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine's standing order, and carrying this on-hand at all times can be a life-saving action. The Wolf Administration encourages all Pennsylvanians to take advantage of the standing order to obtain Naloxone over the holidays. Learn more about how to obtain naloxone at www.pa.gov/opioids.