The Importance of An Annual Healthcare Visit

The *2026 New Year* is a good time to start off with an **Annual Healthcare Visit** or yearly physical examination with a primary care provider (PCP). An annual visit is an important evidence-based part of well-being and should be focused on health, fitness, and preventive care, not just addressing illness or problems.

The Office of Integrated Health Supports Network has put together **"The Annual Healthcare Visits Toolkit"** meant to bolster identified factors which improve the quality of healthcare individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) receive using documents to streamline each step of the process:

- *Pre-visit preparation and planning*.
  - W-1 Pre-Visit Checklist.
  - W-10 Annual Healthcare Visit.
  - W-11 Annual Healthcare Visit Preventive Screening Checklist.
- *Health literacy and learning*.
  - W-2 Common Healthcare Abbreviations.
  - W-3 Common Lab Tests.
  - W-4 Body Mase Index (BMI) Chart.
- *Advocacy and communication*.
  - W-5 DBHDS My Care Passport.
  - W-6 Consent Tip Sheet.
  - W-7 Medicaid Waiver Tip Sheet.
  - W-8 Discharge Tip Sheet.
- *And post-visit follow-up and maintenance*.
  - W-9 Post-Visit Checklist.

These tools can help caregivers navigate the healthcare system more effectively and efficiently resulting in better outcomes for individuals with DD (5) (1) (3) (4) (2).

The Annual Healthcare Visits Toolkit can be downloaded by going to the Office of Integrated Health's website. Click on the Educational Resources button, then scroll down and click on The Annual Healthcare Visit Toolkit button.

Individualize The Annual Healthcare Visits Toolkit

Documents chosen will vary from one individual to the next, as no two individuals are exactly alike. The toolkit for each individual should be person-centered, and its content should be tailored to meet the individual's age and gender.

References
1. Brolan, C. E., Boyle, F. M., Dean, J. H., Gomez, M. T., Ware, R. S., & Lennox, N. G. (2012, November). Health advocacy: a vital step in attaining human rights for adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(11), 1087– 1097. Doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2788.2012.01637.x
2. Durbin, J., Selick, A., Casson, I., Green, L., Perry, A., Abou Chacra, M., & Lunsky, Y. (2019). Improving the quality of primary care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Value of the periodic health examination. *Canadian Family Physician*, 65(Suppl 1), S66-S72.
3. Smith G, Ouellette-Kuntz H, Green M. (2018, April). Comprehensive preventive care assessments for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Part 1: How do we know if it's happening? *Can Family Physician*, 64 (Suppl 2):S57–S62.
4. Romaniak, H. C., & Ausderau, K. K. (2018). Understanding health disparities for individuals with intellectual disability using photovoice. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 25(5), 371-381.
5. Melville C., Finlayson J., Cooper S.-A., Allan L., Robinson N., Burns E., Martin G. & Morrison J. (2005) Enhancing primary health care services for adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 49, 190–198

Contents List

- Some documents in the kit serve as a basic resource.
- Other documents can be individualized and used to share information about the individual.
- 🖨️ ✏️ appear next to the *suggested* basic documents which apply to most individuals.
- New forms may be added to each section.

Toolkit Instructions

- The toolkit instructions review each form in detail.
- It walks the caregiver through step-by-step directions on how to complete each form and its use.
- The instructions help caregivers to decide if a particular form might be useful during the annual healthcare visit.

The Forms

- **W-1** The Pre-Visit Checklist can help streamline the annual healthcare visit.
- **W-2** Common Healthcare Abbreviations are those used throughout the healthcare system.
- **W-3** Common Lab Tests are those frequently ordered by a PCP.
- **W-4** The Body Mass Index (BMI) Chart can be used to compare the ratio of someone's height to weight to estimate their body fat percentage.
- **W-5** The DBHDS My Care Passport is a document which assists caregivers to share important information about the individual with their PCP and other healthcare professionals.
- **W-6** The Consent Tip Sheet is a document to assist healthcare professionals understand surrogate decision makers for persons who lack the ability to make decisions for themselves.
- **W-7** The Medicaid Waiver Tip Sheet briefly explains what a Medicaid Waiver is and gives descriptions of each type of waiver.
- **W-8** The Discharge Tip Sheet outlines the requirements for prescription/orders under the waver system for medications, treatments, protocols, or durable medical equipment.
- **W-9** The Post-Visit Checklist can help streamline a follow-up visit after an annual healthcare visit.
- **W-10** The Annual Healthcare Visit - PCP Appointment Form is for caregivers to take with them to the visit to share information and organize instructions.
- **W-11** The Annual Healthcare Visit Preventive Screening Checklist is for tracking recommended healthcare screening tests for adult with DD.

Please direct any questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network "Health Trends" newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov
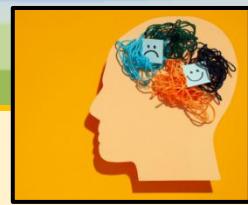
ABA Snippets ...

Start ACTing Now to Create Resolutions that Last

According to a Forbes Health poll from 2023, most people give up on their New Year's resolutions after less than four months (2). If you browse the internet or the shelves of your local library, bookstore or magazine section, you will find a plethora of advice on how to set and succeed in your goals. With all this expert advice at our fingertips, one might think that New Year's resolutions would last longer than four months. If you're like most participants who took the poll, and you give up on your New Year's resolutions rather quickly, consider using an ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) approach this year. One of the six core aspects of ACT is values. Before setting your goals, first, identify your values. Values are different from goals, as they are how you want to live your life, and are not something you can achieve.

For example, a value is "being healthy", while a goal would be "exercising for 20 minutes 3 times a week." By first identifying your values, you can then take action steps that move you towards those values, which could be in the form of goals.

A study by Chase and colleagues (1) compared college students' performance when setting behaviorally based goals vs when setting behaviorally based goals combined with training on ACT values. They found that the group with the ACT based values training had a significant improvement in their GPAs, while "goal setting alone had no positive impact on academic performance." (1).

Even the most beautifully written goals can fail if there's no direction. If you'd like to start ACTing by identifying your values, try this Values Writing exercise by Steven Hayes. Once you know what direction you're heading, check out the ABA Snippet from last year for some behaviorally sound advice on developing goals.

You may contact DBHDS at: Courtney.Pernick@dbhds.virginia.gov with any questions or concerns regarding the ABA Snippet article.

References
1. Chase, J. A., Houmanfar, R., Hayes, S. C., Ward, T. A., Vilardaga, J. P., & Follette, V. (2013). Values are not just goals: Online ACT-based values training adds to goal setting in improving undergraduate college student performance. Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science, 2(3-4), 79-84.
2. Lloyd, M., & DiGiacinto, J. (2024, January 12). 2024 New Year's resolutions: Nearly half cite fitness as their top priority. Forbes.

New Year Safety Checks

Check All Smoke Alarms & Carbon Monoxide Detectors
- To reduce life threatening emergencies, caregivers and individuals should practice fire safety. In addition to actively reviewing and practicing fire evacuation plans it is important to check all batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors.

Know The Alert Sound For Each Alarm
- The National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) suggests everyone know the sound of each alarm when it goes off and know what actions they should take when the sound is heard.
- Homes with any gas-powered appliances should be equipped with carbon monoxide (CO) detectors and smoke alarms. CO is a deadly gas which cannot be seen or smelled.

Know The Alert Sound For Weak Batteries
- If short chirping sounds are heard every 30 to 60 seconds from either the smoke alarm or the CO detector this means the battery needs to be replaced.
- If the battery has been replaced and the chirping sounds continue then it's time to replace the smoke alarm or CO detector. The NFPA recommends smoke alarms and CO detectors be replaced every 10 years.

Stay Safe During Electrical Outages
- During electrical outages, gas powered generators are often used. Generators should be placed *at least 20 feet away from a home* and should never be placed near a window, a basement entry, a cellar door opening, or any intake for your home's ventilation system, such as a heat pump.
- Why? Carbon monoxide is sneaky and can easily find its way into the smallest crack around a window casing or under a door.
- For example, if a gas-powered generator is placed near your heat pump intake, the CO can be easily sucked into the home's ventilation system (i.e., ductwork) and distributed throughout the whole house in a matter of minutes.

Fire Safety Resources
- You can download the National Fire Protection Agency's fire safety tip sheets and resources here.

Reference
1. Johnson-Arbor, K. K., Quental, A. S., & Li, D. (2014). A comparison of carbon monoxide exposures after snowstorms and power outages. American journal of preventive medicine, 46(5), 481-486.
2. Mahoney, S. (2022, February). Smoke alarm troubleshooting. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). 1-6.
3. National Fire Protection Association (2024). Fire Safety Tips for Cold Weather.