COVID-19 CREDIBLE INFORMATION SOURCES
Thank you to all of our partners who are working diligently to ensure client needs are met and that staff are protected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rest assured that VDH is in full operation and DDP is implementing its Continuity of Operations Plan to ensure that essential services such as medication access and invoice processing are covered. While many staff are teleworking, you should still be able to reach us by phone or email. A number of staff are deployed to assist with COVID-19 investigations and many staff are assisting with COVID-19 planning, operations and communications.

Please ensure that you are using credible sources of information on COVID-19. While social media can be an important tool to communicate with others during social distancing, it is also filled with misinformation. Do your part to protect your community, family, and friends, and debunk any myths you see on social media. Only share information from credible sources.

Please ensure that you are getting your news and updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). If you do share information from other sources, make sure that they cite their information and that you fact check that information before sharing it. The CDC and VDH update their pages on COVID-19 daily, to provide the community with as much information as possible as it becomes available. The links for both sources are as follows:

- VDH: www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus

COVID-19 WEBINAR FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS
DDP recently hosted a webinar for partners to review recommendations and discuss continuity of operations during the COVID-19 response. You can view the webinar here: https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/1407495135964111875. For a copy of the slides only, click here: http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/COVID-19_CBO-Training.pdf. Please note that some information, especially data, has changed since the webinar’s broadcast.
2019 HIV ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE
Virginia’s 2019 HIV Annual Report is now available online. The 2019 HIV Annual Report is a snapshot of the HIV epidemic statewide. It includes demographics and geographic trends on new HIV diagnoses and the number of persons living with HIV. The Annual Report can also be used for grant applications, presentations, and data requests. For additional information or questions, please contact Latanya Crawford at latanya.crawford@vdh.virginia.gov.

COMPREHENSIVE HARM REDUCTION LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
The 2020 session of the Virginia General Assembly was highly successful for comprehensive harm reduction (CHR) programs. The original 2017 legislation included a sunset clause that would end syringe services programs as of July 1, 2020. Legislators in both chambers introduced identical bills (House Bill 378 and Senate Bill 864) to remove the sunset clause. Both bills easily passed in the House and Senate.

House Bill 791 proposed significant changes to Virginia’s CHR law and removes a number of restrictions on CHR that made it challenging for some agencies and localities to start programs. The bill allows any Virginia community to start a CHR program, not just those designated as vulnerable for an HIV or Hepatitis C outbreak. It also removes several start-up requirements, including law enforcement and local government approval, and HIV and Hepatitis testing. Most importantly, HB791 extends legal protections from drug paraphernalia charges to CHR program participants. The 2017 law protected only staff and volunteers from those charges, which created disincentives for people to returned used syringes and placed law enforcement in a difficult position over enforcing the current law while being supportive of CHR. House Bill 791 passed both chambers of the General Assembly as of March 6, 2020 and will go into effect July 1, 2020. Potential CHR sites must still be authorized by Virginia Department of Health.

DDP will be working over the next few months to revise its CHR program policies and procedures and will host a meeting (perhaps by teleconference!) with stakeholders to get community input, review minimum requirements, best practices and CDC recommendations, and requirements that will be specific to agencies requesting CHR funding from VDH.

Thank you to all the community partners who championed CHR services and participated in the legislative process. For questions about CHR, please contact Bruce Taylor, Drug User Health Coordinator at bruce.taylor@vdh.virginia.gov or 804-864-8015.

PREP LAWSUIT ADVERTISEMENTS
Misleading advertisements sponsored by law firms may be hurting the uptake of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The ads, which appeared on Facebook and television, overstate the side effects of Truvada, one of two medications now available as PrEP, according to an advocacy group. For more information on this topic visit www.reuters.com/article/us-health-hiv-prep-idUSKBN20P388.

STDs IN THE NEWS
- Poll: U.S. Adults Lack STI Awareness- U. S. News & World Report references the National STI Coalition
- States step up funding for Planned Parenthood clinics- The Washington Post
- Interviews Show Mixed HPV Knowledge Among Young MSM- Contagion Live
- Why Are So Many Teens Ditching Condoms?- Healthline
STD AWARENESS MONTH IS NOW STD AWARENESS WEEK
After thorough consideration and engagement with colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in the field, STD Awareness Month is now STD Awareness Week. While the timing is shifting, the goals remain the same: raise awareness about STDs and how they impact our lives; ensure people have the tools and knowledge to prevent, test for, and timely treat STDs; and break down the STD-related barriers of stigma, fear, and discrimination. STDs impact people daily not just during a certain week or month so let’s continue prevention and testing year-round!

PERSONNEL
Farewell
On February 24, 2020, Agapito Ruiz-Millan retired from VDH to return to his home in Puerto Rico. Agapito served as the HIV/AIDS Hotline Manager since 2016. He previously served as a hotline counselor under his mentor, Ryland Roane. Agapito thoroughly trained hotline counselors and ensured that they fully understood their roles and responsibilities and were clear on the expectations and the goals and objectives of the hotline. Under Agapito’s leadership, the hotline positioned itself as a trusted resource to all programs within DDP and the Office of Epidemiology. Agapito also expanded the pool of Spanish-speaking hotline counselors ready to help callers.

Agapito always maintained a positive attitude and was a great team player. He provided assistance to all programs within DDP and was very conscientious about his work and the performance of the hotline. Agapito’s plans are to sip Pina Coladas, plant a garden and enjoy the tropical breezes. We wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement.