



Personal Assistance Options

Personal Care • Quality Assistance • Individual Options

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July 22, 2021

Dear Friends and Supporters of PAO,

It's hard to believe that it's the third week in July. I'm finding that as I get older, time seems to be going by quicker. Or is it because there's a light at the end of the COVID tunnel? "Time does seem to be going really fast," agrees Claudia Hammond, author of "Time Warp: Unlocking the Mysteries of Time Perception", noting that it's our perception of time that feels unusual, separate from the way time actually works. In our minds, "time can warp very easily".

For those who stayed home during the pandemic, which is most of us, it had a lot to do with our world shrinking to the bare minimum – staying at home for the vast majority of the day, with trips outside only for exercise or a visit to the grocery store. For the most part, we were not taking part in particularly memorable activities, like having dinner with a friend, going to a sporting event, or traveling. There were fewer signals differentiating a Sunday from a Monday. "The more emotional a memory, the longer perception of time duration," Hammond explains. And if you were doing the same thing every day – the new normal for many in quarantine – there was no need to remember each day specifically. Even if time passes slowing in the moment, it's likely that nothing will stand out upon looking back, causing you to perceive time as passing by quickly in the long run.

James Broadway, an instructor of psychology at Lincoln Land Community College in Illinois, who has studied the brain's perception of time, notes a similar phenomenon occurs when we age. The older we get, the fewer novel events we experience, which causes time to feel as if it's going by faster than it did earlier in our lives. Time will pass slowly as it's experienced but then feel as if it's gone by quickly in retrospect.

For us at PAO, time passes by quickly and there never seems to be enough time to get those items accomplished on our "to-do" lists. There's rarely a dull moment and always something new to learn and discover. I look forward to putting the pandemic behind us and will stay in the moment of each day so it's remembered and cherished for years to come.

State News: The Michigan Legislature is not expected to finalize the state budget for the next fiscal year for at least another few weeks. In addition to concluding on the 2021-2022 state budget, the Michigan Legislature and Governor Whitmer will be deciding on the allocation of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars.

PAO Mission: Providing support to individuals with differing abilities based on their personal needs and goals.

Both the Senate and House are recommending the premium pay increase be funded for the entire next fiscal year starting October 1, 2021. The Senate recommendation is for a \$2.35 per hour premium pay increase for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. The House recommendation is for a \$2.00 per hour premium pay increase for the next fiscal year which coincides with the Governor's recommendation. However, it should be noted that the Governor's recommendation of \$2.00 per hour preceded the increase to \$2.25 per hour effective March 1, 2021.

PAO provided a \$0.50 per hour increase back in October of 2020, and each local mental health agency we contract with (Community Mental Health for Central Michigan and Bay Arenac Behavioral Health) have also provided an increase in the reimbursement rate in addition to the state's increases. The overall goal is to lift the wage of Direct Support Staff to bring value to the position and allow these hard-working employees the opportunity to make a living that's above minimum wage.

Senate Bills Introduced on Behavioral Health Redesign. As expected, bills have been introduced in the Michigan Senate on redesigning the behavioral health system. Senate Bills 597 and 598 propose numerous changes to the Social Welfare Act and Mental health Code respectively. The sponsors of the bills are Senate majority Leader Mike Shirkey and Senator John Bizon.

Although the legislation proposed in the Senate and House would both eliminate the current PIHP structure (PIHP – Prepaid Inpatient Health Plan. Effective January 1, 2014, Michigan has 10 PIHP's responsible for managing the Medicaid resources for behavioral health and Intellectual & Developmental Disability services for Medicaid and Healthy Michigan enrollees), the two proposals are significantly different. In particular, the Senate proposal would combine the funding for behavioral health specialty services and physical health care. Rather than combining the funding sources, the House proposal would establish a single administrative organization to distribute the behavioral health funding. A behavioral health redesign would potentially result in a change such that PAO is no longer contracting with our local mental health agency. For example, under Senate Bills 597 and 598, our contract would potentially be with a specialty integrated plan which is other than the current mental health agency. Another factor is the Whitmer Administration has not yet adopted a position on the Senate or House proposal.

It's unlikely that any legislation on behavioral health redesign will pass in the Michigan Legislature for at least another several months. I'll keep you updated as I learn more over the coming months.

PAO News.

COVID Update. We've been very fortunate that COVID-19 hasn't had a huge impact for us as an agency. Since January of this year, two employees tested positive (contact tracing indicated the connection wasn't through work); two consumers tested positive (contact tracing indicated it came from family members, not support staff), and a total of 14 employees ended up being quarantined (some due to the two consumers who tested positive that they served). Given that we have approximately 130 employees and about 110 people served, the statistics could have been a lot worse. Keeping a good supply of PPE available for employees and those we serve hasn't been an issue and we continue to take precautions within the office, even though many restrictions have been lifted by the CDC and MIOSHA.

As a business in the health care field, we must follow the requirements of MIOSHA, which is currently following OSHA's Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) requirements. At this point, MIOSHA doesn't have a determination as to whether OSHA's ETS requirements apply to Community Living Support (CLS) services provided in a non-licensed setting. However, MIOSHA has clarified that the ETS mask requirement does not apply when employees are working outdoors. Until we have better clarification for support services in an individual's home, it seems advisable to continue to have employees wear a mask while in someone's home or in their vehicle with someone they serve.

Collaboration with Disability Network of MidMichigan. I'm thrilled with this first-ever collaboration between PAO and Disability Network, in celebrating the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. Come join us on Monday, July 26th, between 4:00p-8:00p, at Auburn Park (near US-10) with a food truck, live music, a bounce house, popcorn & cotton candy, kayaking, and more as we celebrate inclusion for all.

Annual Appreciation Picnic. I'm excited to have this event return this year and it's scheduled for Wednesday, July 28th, between 4:30p – 6:30p, at Emerson Park in Midland. All those we serve, our support staff, and guardians and family members are invited to enjoy free grilled food, side dishes and cold drinks, and an opportunity to visit with people they haven't seen in quite some time. Please reach out to Amber Royce, our Administrative Assistant, if you'd like to attend.

Annual Fund Raiser. The Celebrity Art Gala will be held on September 30th, beginning at 6p at the Midland Holiday Inn. The two "celebrity" teams in a friendly competition are Dow Chemical Employees Credit Union and Isabella Bank. The local artists have such amazing gifts and talents, with a few new artists joining our event this year. I always look forward to this fun celebration and hope you will join us as we share our passion of the life-changing work we do at PAO. For tickets or more information, please contact Amber Royce at (989) 837-8350.

I remain hopeful the day will come when COVID-19 is a thing of the past and we can enjoy each other's company without using words like 'new normal', 'social distancing' and 'flatten the curve'. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Best regards,



Kathleen S. Allen
Executive Director