



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
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To: All BSAS Licensees

From: Deirdre Calvert, LICSW, Director of the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

Date: April 27, 2021

Re: Use of Canine Searches in BSAS-licensed Facilities

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The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to all programs licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (DPH) Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) on conducting patient searches in a trauma-informed manner, ensuring that all programs and staff follow evidence-based practices, uphold patient/resident rights, and support patient/resident dignity in treatment. It has come to BSAS's attention that some programs have initiated the practice of using canine vendors for the purpose of contraband searches. BSAS is asking that programs refrain from this practice until further notice.

**This guidance is intended to supplement, not supplant, provisions from regulatory agencies that oversee programs licensed by BSAS.**

**Refraining from the use of Canines in Searches**

BSAS encourages programs to always utilize evidence-based, trauma-informed practices that maintain patient/resident dignity. To this end, BSAS notes that the effectiveness of using drug-detecting canines in searches is highly variable across studies, while also having the potential to impact patients negatively in a treatment environment.

Accordingly, this guidance is notifying programs to refrain from the use of canines in searches until such time as BSAS determines that such searches are effective and can be utilized with no impact on patient/resident well-being and recovery. Contraband search policies should be developed to be trauma informed and in compliance with patient rights

**Call BSAS' Helpline at 1-800-327-5050** (8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm on weekends) to get information on programs and services that are best for you in your area. Go to [www.helplinema.org/help](http://www.helplinema.org/help) for more details.