



Director's Message

Dear OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Team,

As we start 2024, I would like to wish you a "Happy New Year." I am glad you are a part of our HCA family and I hope that the new year brings you much happiness, laughter, and good fortune. The beginning of a new year is a highly energized time, as we begin to plan for the upcoming months and the changes that it will bring. This year is no different. Change can be exciting, but it can also bring on feelings of anxiety and the fear that comes with uncertainty. We have a lot going on in the HCA and 2024 will bring with it another season of change filled with new regulatory requirements, changes in leadership

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FEATURED ARTICLES

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Peer-to-Peer

Edward Fuentes

"I have always had a desire to bring about change in those around me to help them fulfill their fullest potential." **Edward Fuentes** is a Behavioral Health Clinician II with the OC Health Care Agency (HCA), Mental Health and Recovery Services (MHRS), Adult Older Adult (AOA), Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) in Fullerton. Edward said he sees his role as more than just a job which motivates him to do his best to help others and get the very best out of people. "I see my role at HCA as being part of a team that helps to bring change in the lives of those that we serve," Edward said.

Edward also sees his work as making an impact on the people that he serves. "Seeing clients go from having a hard time being able to maintain their symptoms without support from others to then be able to be a supportive factor in the lives of others is the goal," he said. Edward enjoys being able to work with other like-minded professionals in the process of offering others support. "I have learned so much from those around me and that I have worked with at times. I take those lessons with me every day I go to work. So, I thank you to all those who have interacted with me in my life," he said.

Before he started his career at HCA, Edward worked in the medical field. He graduated from UOP-Gardena with a master's in counseling. He is originally from Northern California, but has lived in Orange County since he was eight years old. When he is not helping his clients, Edward is playing video games and pursuing his spiritual life to get a better understanding of the world around him.



Director's Message *continued from page 1*

and new operational processes. Though change can be difficult and uncomfortable, I have learned over the years that the end result is worth the journey we undertook to get there. I am confident that our HCA family can navigate these times of uncertainty together and that we, as we have always done, will rise to any challenge.

The County of Orange has reopened recruitment for the position of HCA Director. I'll share more on the process as information is provided by the County Executive Office. I am pleased to share about the combining of several highly performing HCA teams under **James Kim**, the HCA's Government Affairs and Communications Assistant Deputy Director. Reporting to James will be the Directors of Legislative Affairs, Communications, and the Office of Population Health and Equity, as well as managers for Project Management and Quality Assurance, and the Research Teams. You can find the HCA's Organizational Charts on the Intranet [here](#).

Our teams are already hard at work this new year. Mental Health and Recovery Services (MHRS) is working to implement Senate Bill (SB) 43 in Orange County by January 2026. SB 43 makes several significant changes to the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act which requires MHRS to develop an extensive array of new policies, procedures, treatment capacity, and training for the MHRS workforce. MHRS will be conducting a needs assessment analysis that will provide a clear plan for implementation. MHRS is also implementing a new Mobile Crisis Benefit as required by the state for Medi-Cal beneficiaries. This new benefit involves sending a two-person team into the field to respond to people experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. Requirements include but are not limited to: 24/7 access, rapid response, standardized screening and dispatch protocols, standardized assessment tool, standardized trainings, involvement of peers and appropriate follow up and coordination with other services.

Public Health Services (PHS) is on track to launch the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) in collaboration with other health leaders. The CHIP is a community-informed process that has identified priority health issues

for Orange County to focus on including mental health, substance use, and diabetes/obesity. Our PHS team also joins state efforts in addressing what's sometimes called the "Silver Tsunami," which refers to the large number of the county's population who are aging, specifically those 65 and older, and will require an increase in social and medical support. One component is the Healthy Brain Initiative that involves a detailed assessment of current and future needs of this population in relation to Alzheimer's and other related dementias.

Our Correctional Health Services (CHS) carries out the implementation of CalAIM for the justice involved population, creating a path and process for coordinated care for incarcerated individuals and detained youth that extends from correctional facilities back into the community, for a more successful reentry. CHS will also expand services for high-risk populations in the Orange County jails – to include LGBTQ+, developmentally and intellectually disabled, and those diagnosed with substance use disorders. Clinical teams are being developed to oversee the policies and practices that govern care delivery to ensure a robust health system that meets the unique needs of these populations.

These are just some of what's ahead for the HCA in 2024. Also coming is a way for HCA staff to reach out directly to me and other leaders within the Agency via email. You'll be able to submit your thoughts, ideas, questions and suggestions via the Intranet through the "What's on Your Mind" platform. I look forward to sending you an email when the platform is ready.

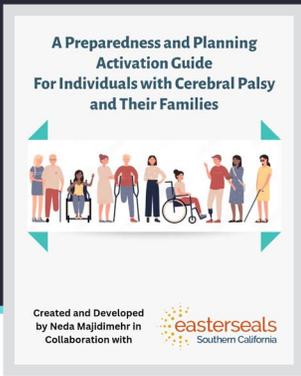
As always I am grateful to each of you for your dedication and commitment and I encourage you to embrace the new!

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra Baetz". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Debra Baetz
Interim Agency Director



Creating an Emergency Management Plan for Individuals with Cerebral Palsy

The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Emergency Medical Services (EMS) team is dedicated to making Orange County a safe, healthy, and fulfilling place to live, work, and play. The latest example of the team's dedication is exemplified by EMS Program Coordinator **Neda Majidimehr**, who created an emergency disaster plan for individuals with cerebral palsy. "Individuals with disabilities have been affected disproportionately for far too long and I hope this guide will provide some sort of comfort in times of chaos," said Neda. "I wanted to create something that would not only close the gap in Emergency Management, but also aid over three quarters of a million individuals with Cerebral Palsy in the United States."

It took Neda four years to complete the plan, which is titled, "Preparedness and Planning Activation Guide for Individuals with Cerebral Palsy and Their Families." She started working on it as an undergrad student and completed it while finishing her master's. Her inspiration for the project came from her younger brother. "I grew up with him going to occupational, physical, and speech therapy for the majority of his life. The experience made me realize the world is very underprepared for individuals with Cerebral Palsy. The plan emphasizes how families of

individuals with Cerebral Palsy would benefit, as the guide does all the work for parents, caregivers, and families, since it is a daunting task to create a plan without any help."

Neda also took the initiative to put her plan in action and presented it to the EasterSeals organization. They were so impressed that they are now distributing Neda's plan to all the families and individuals on their roster. EasterSeals

is one of the largest nonprofit programs in the United States. "When they accepted my offer of being a Community Partner to my Thesis and Project, I was overjoyed. I feel that they will be able to distribute this plan and get it to families who need it in a timely fashion. I'm so proud of the project and have faith that it can change people's lives and positively impact the Emergency Management field."

Neda started interning at the HCA in August 2022. She was offered a full-time position in November 2022. "I knew I wanted a career in the disaster management field and thought the HCA would be the perfect place to start, as they are at the forefront of a lot of disasters.

I knew I wanted to be a part of a team that does exactly that, and after meeting the Agency Operations Center team, I knew I wanted to be part of their family," she said.



Neda Majidimehr and her brother Keyvan.

MY WORK MATTERS

The HCA would like to hear from you for “My Work Matters.” Click on this link and fill out the questions https://bit.ly/My_Work_Matters. The HCA will give one of the stylish “My Work Matters” mugs to respondents, while supplies last. All responses will be reviewed, and those that are selected for use may be edited for clarity and brevity.



GRACELYN LIZARDO



Gracelyn LizarDO

RN Medical Services Manager
Juvenile Health Services (JHS)
24 years with JHS

“As a Registered Nurse, I have always been intrigued and had the heart and passion to work with justice-involved youth, and in turn, have always wanted to practice nursing in juvenile detention facilities and group homes. I started my nursing journey with this vulnerable population, it became apparent that the nursing care (and overall health care) provided to the youth while in our facilities significantly impacted the youth’s lives. Providing essential health care services at a gold standard directly impacts the youth’s health, well-being, and their lives overall as young individuals. JHS’ mantra and our “why” is doing “what is in the best interest of the youth.” From an individual and collective standpoint, what we do matters because the health care that JHS provides to this vulnerable population assists in their recovery and rehabilitation.”

ROSIE GRIGGS



Rosie Griggs

Office Specialist - Environmental Health
6 years with HCA

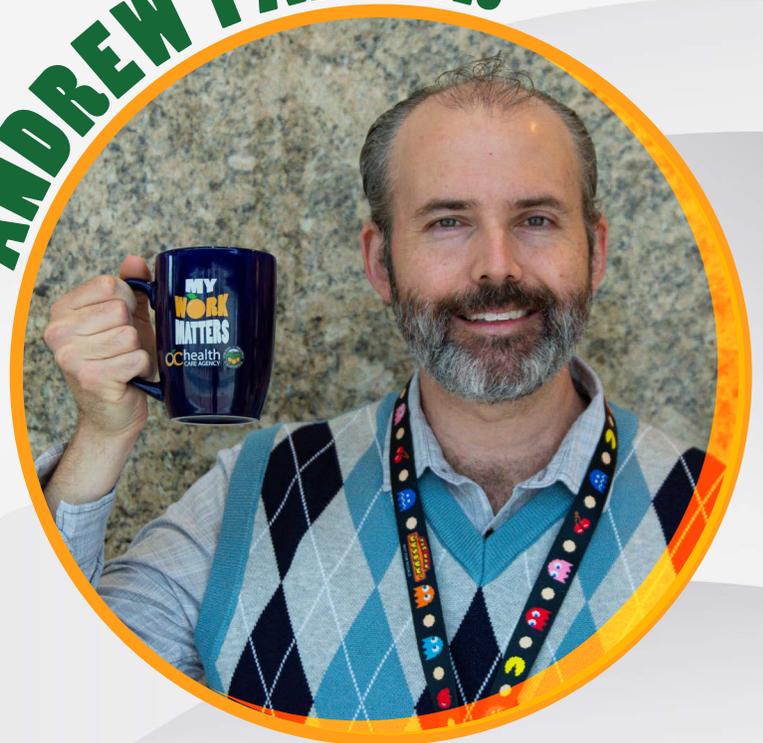
“My work matters because I can help business owners obtain their Health Permits to operate a Food Facility, whether it is a Restaurant, Cottage Food, Shared Food, or Mobile Food cart/truck, or for other areas of Environmental Health, such as Water Quality and Hazardous Waste including Body Art. Having to know the different processes within Environmental Health and how to help clients understand what is required from the Plan Check process, with submitting plans and the different requirements, reviewing the actual Health Permit for accuracy and that the required documents are provided, to obtaining payment for their health permit. Walking the client through what could be a long arduous process to seeing their relief when they finally get that permit gives me great sense of satisfaction.”

Andrew Parker

Behavioral Health Clinician II
10 years with the HCA

“My work matters because I get to help support the work of our HCA Mental Health and Recovery Services programs do, and there is always something new to do. I love trying to help other people and making their days a bit brighter and easier to manage. I am encouraged by teamwork and anything that helps me grow. There is so much to learn out there! I always jump feet-first into all of my projects. I try to encourage others to be brave, and to expand their knowledge, especially in technology and public speaking.”

ANDREW PARKER



Congressional Recognition for Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program



Brenda Villa and Ashley English, Public Health Nurses.

Congratulations to the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Public Health Services (PHS) Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP). The CLPPP received a Congressional Certificate of Special Recognition from the Office of US House of Representative Lou Correa, (D-46th CA District). The certificate was received on behalf of the CLPPP by **Brenda Villa**, Public Health Nurse (PHN), and **Ashley English**, PHN, while they represented the CLPPP during the Fiestas Navideñas in Santa Ana.

The certificate recognizes the CLPPP for, “your altruist service and ability to bring joy... Thank you for the act of love for children and families at the Fiestas Navideñas.” The CLPPP did outreach at the event, which included sources of lead, preventive measures, blood lead testing for children, the Housing and Urban Development/California Department of Public Health Lead Hazard Removal Program, and community resources for health care. There were more than 200 attendees, including students and parents at Legacy College Prep, an Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) charter school, nearby residents,

representative from Congressman Lou Correa’s office, the school’s leadership and staff, and leadership from other OCDE charter schools.

CLPPP staff at the event said those they spoke to were very engaged with the program. Staff were also contacted by the principal of a charter school in Santa Ana who expressed appreciation for the work done by the CLPPP. The principal said the school will invite the CLPPP to attend a parents meeting to give a presentation on lead poisoning prevention.

“This is a wonderful recognition for the CLPPP, the work we do, and the people who do the work” said **Cecile Truong**, CLPPP Coordinator. “What makes this more special is that it also shows the dedication of our team. PHN, Brenda volunteered for this event after a long day of doing home visits. Ashley immediately agreed to accompany Brenda so she could learn about our outreach activity as a new PHN. The CLPPP is grateful for the recognition and the opportunity to recognize those who do the great work they do!”



ROUNDTABLES: SUPERVISOR TIPS AND RESOURCES

The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Human Resources team is pleased to offer our first quarter of virtual Roundtable discussions covering various personnel topics. The Roundtable Opportunities prompt some great discussions with Managers and Supervisors on topics and issues related to their roles and responsibilities as HCA Leadership.

Discussions will be facilitated live, via Microsoft Teams, and the format will include a 30-minute presentation followed by a 15-minute interactive Question and Answer session. Applicable resources, links, and sample documents will be provided to participants.

Due to the desire to make this an interactive meeting, the meetings will be limited to 25 participants each session.

To sign-up, please email the contact for each topic and specify which session(s) you would like to be enrolled in; please note each session is a stand-alone meeting. You will receive a confirmation email with a Teams calendar invite.

Future discussion opportunities will focus on questions and topics that are frequently received by our team. We look forward to continuing our partnership with all of you!

JANUARY – MARCH 2024 Virtual Roundtable Opportunities:

Supervisor Expectations – The Recruitment Planning Process

Wednesdays, 1/17 & 1/31

10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Contact: Linny Pham

lipham@ochca.com

Supervisor Expectations – Setting the Employee/Supervisor Relationship Up For Success

Wednesdays, 2/14 & 2/28

10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Contact: Bergit Englund Giri

benglundgiri@ochca.com

Supervisor Expectations – Navigating the Employee Leave of Absence Process

Wednesdays, 3/13 & 3/27

10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Contact: Brianna Cordova

brcordova@ochca.com



★

Veteran Health and Wellness Summit Focuses on the Underserved in the Military Community of Orange County

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Opening remarks by **Dr. Veronica Kelley**, Chief of Mental Health and Recovery Services.

Contributor: **Dr. Mike Mullard**, Clinical Training Coordinator

The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Mental Health and Recovery Services (MHRS) co-convened what turned out to be one of the largest attended Veteran Health and Wellness Summits. The partnership is a collaboration between the HCA; MHRS; the Veteran's

Administration, Long Beach; the University of California, Irvine; the Child Guidance Center; and the Council on Aging Orange County (OC).

Dr. Veronica Kelley, Chief of MHRS, provided welcoming remarks to the attendees, which numbered about 160 people. Conference participants enjoyed a free continental breakfast and lunch. Among the luncheon activities, Guitars for Vets spoke about their program, which provides free guitars and music



lessons to Veterans struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Musical interventions among Veterans show a strong base of evidence, with one study demonstrating a 21% improvement in PTSD symptoms and 27% decrease in depression-related symptoms among Veterans who learned to play the guitar.

The keynote speaker, Justice Eileen Moore of the California Superior Court, spoke on her experiences as a nurse during the Vietnam conflict. She also discussed the negative reception received by Vietnam Vets upon return from the conflict and how it negatively impacted them. Breakout sessions included presentations on gender identity and sexual orientation among armed forces personnel; the effects of the Gulf War Syndrome 30 years later; Intergenerational Trauma with Families; Military Sexual Trauma; Suicide Prevention; and Traumatic Brain Injury in Veterans.

Paws 4 Purple Hearts brought three of their therapy dogs to the event, reminding attendees of the uses for pets to help ameliorate the effects of anxiety, PTSD and reduced mobility. The dogs generated a lot of interest among participants who spent time at lunch interacting with them and their human guardians. The mission of Paws 4 Purple Hearts is to improve the lives of veterans facing trauma and mobility challenges, as well as to build public awareness about the role that dogs play in helping veterans recover and return to an active life.

Elana Randol, Service Chief II of OC4Vets summed up the event nicely by sharing, “This is my first year working with the planning committee for the Summit. It was great to be part of such a talented team who really made this year’s Veterans Health and Wellness Summit such a great event. Important educational topics were presented in the breakout sessions and, it was an honor to have Justice Moore presenting the Keynote.”



The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) would like to introduce and say “welcome” to new staff with the Agency and say “congratulations” to promoted staff. Those listed here started between November 17, 2023 to December 15, 2023.

New Hires

Mental Health and Recovery Services

- Dadhania, Shivalee**
- Escamilla, Leanna**
- Figueroa, Giovanni**
- Garcia, Valerie**
- Grey, Quiara**
- Park, Sungju**
- Persons, Heather**
- Le, Tiffany**
- Leonard, Jennifer**
- Marcinkevycz, Michele**
- Murillo, Christopher**
- Nunn, Chelsea**
- Portillo, Jennie**
- Vasquez, Javier**
- Washington, Sydney**

Public Health Services

- Castro-Sandoval, Jessica**
- Edwards, Elisha**
- Delicana, Maria**
- Knepper, Ada**
- Moreno, Amy**
- Pham, Trang**

Correctional Health Services

- Silenski, Janeth**
- Carlos, Xeres**
- Curran, Tina**
- Mariscal, Chanel**
- Pham, Justin**
- Preza, Russell**
- Bitun, Cheryl**
- Cruz, Leah**
- De Guzman, Jackie**
- Luna, Vincent**
- Mutabazi, Beatrice**

Director’s Office

- Miller, Brandy**

Administrative Services

- Deveraux, Latrice**

Promotions

- Adourian, Lara** Sr. Research Analyst
- Argame, Jocelyn** Sr. Comprehensive Care Nurse
- Le, Jennifer** Behavioral Health Clinician II
- Lopez, Maria** Mental Health Specialist
- Pham, Luyen** HCA Service Chief II
- Shaw, Brittany** HCA Service Chief I



Congratulations



Congratulations to Dr. Veronica Kelley “OC’s 125 Most Influential”

Congratulations to **Dr. Veronica Kelley**, Chief of Mental Health and Recovery Services on being recognized as one of the “125 Most Influential in Orange County (OC) in 2023” by the OC Register. The annual list features those who made a significant impact on OC during the previous year.

“I am honored to be noted as an influential person by the Orange County Register and very cognizant of the fact that you can’t influence people if they don’t trust you,” said Dr. Kelley. “There is a lot of responsibility

in that, and I do not take that lightly, especially in the behavioral health space, as the stakes are beyond high and involve real people with real concerns — many are life and death, such as addiction. Treatment works and recovery happens,” she said.

One of the many highlights for Dr. Kelley in 2023 was educating the community on the dangers of fentanyl during the Fentanyl is Forever campaign. You can see the Most Influential list [here](#).

The Great American Smokeout

The Great American Smokeout (GASO) is an annual event held on the third Thursday in November. It encourages individuals across the nation to quit smoking/vaping and start a healthier, smoke-free life. This year for the GASO, the Tobacco Use Prevention Program partnered with youth and staff at Project Access in Cypress to conduct a tobacco litter clean-up at Mackay Park. Youth were trained on what to look for and how to conduct the park clean-up safely. In total, the youth picked up 173 cigarette butts in 30 minutes.

Emily Lui, California Department of Public Health fellow, said, "It was incredibly rewarding to support youth

tobacco education at the Tobacco Litter Park Clean-up at Project Access in Cypress! I'm always inspired by the youth's energy and their enthusiasm for promoting tobacco cessation and reducing secondhand smoke exposure in public spaces. Educating young people about the harmful effects of tobacco and empowering them to lead smoke-free lives was a great way to celebrate the Great American Smokeout (GASO). Prevention is key to ending the tobacco epidemic, especially among the youth, and I'm grateful to work with the Tobacco Use Prevention Program in protecting future generations from this public health threat."



Great American Smokeout

November 16, 2023

SERVICE AWARDS

2023 Fourth Quarter Employee Service Awards

(October 1 – December 31 Hire Dates)

Congratulations to the following staff for their years of service to the OC Health Care Agency and the County of Orange!

40 YEARS

Katherine Harvey

35 YEARS

Brandi Solarte
Cecile Truong

30 YEARS

Mario Gutierrez
Donna Lundgren
Esther Viramontes

25 YEARS

Paula Bishop
Kerri Gardner
Gary Guzman
Vida Mofidi
Maria Montellano
Thanh Nguyen
Carolyn Secrist
Deborah Townes
Vitina Vu

20 YEARS

Darlene Amaya-McDonald
Vanessa Barragan
Desiree Mares
Dung Phan
Ana Pope
Lawrence Pritchett
Cheryl Seitter
Wendy Wilfert

15 YEARS

Maria Moore

10 YEARS

Debbie Cabrera
Consuelo Carcel
Jocelyn Castellanos
Monica Curran
Veronica De Fernandez
Marco Escobedo
Kelley Flores
Nora Flores
Joe Garcia
Shumly Iqbal
Cynthia Jessome
Tessa Knowlson
Maria Marin
Alexandra Merritt
Yajaira Meza
Amelia Northcliff
Nathan Obbards
Alfonso Ochoa
Yvonne Ortiz-haney
Lucinda Shah
Paula Shahinian
Eric Shearer
Min Suh
Stella Tong Dang
Marty Walter
Cyntralia Williams

5 YEARS

Katherine Alvarado Perez
Andrew Bennett
Brooke Brown
Gerry Campo
Melissa Cornejo
Martha Cruz Santana
Octavio Cruz
Edward Darvin
Alex Diaz
Lizbeth Esparza
Miriam Esparza
Matthew Gibbons
Claudia Gonzalez De Griese
Maria Gonzalez Guillen
Maggie Ibarra
Debora Jason
Meyri Kroell
Kai-ming Lin
Suraj Manandhar
Ed Mertz
Joseph Minderhoud
Cynthia Miranda
Christopher Nguyen
Cindy Nunez-Flores
Nga Phan
Maynard Ramirez
Mardy Sos
Agatha Wise
Edgar Zavaleta Varela



Mental Health and Nutrition

Healthy eating and good mental health are connected. What you eat not only affects you physically, but can also affect your mental health. The relation between eating and mental health is bi-directional; one's mood or psychological state can affect what and how much one eats, and eating may impact one's mood and physiological well-being.

Maintaining mental wellness allows an individual to function normally in terms of appetite and nutrition, physical activity, sleep, work habits, and personal relationships. It can also help one better cope with the normal stresses and worries of life. When a person is in an unsettled state of mind or experiencing severe mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, or suffering, they may have a harder time coping with day to day living. They may lack appetite or eat excessively.

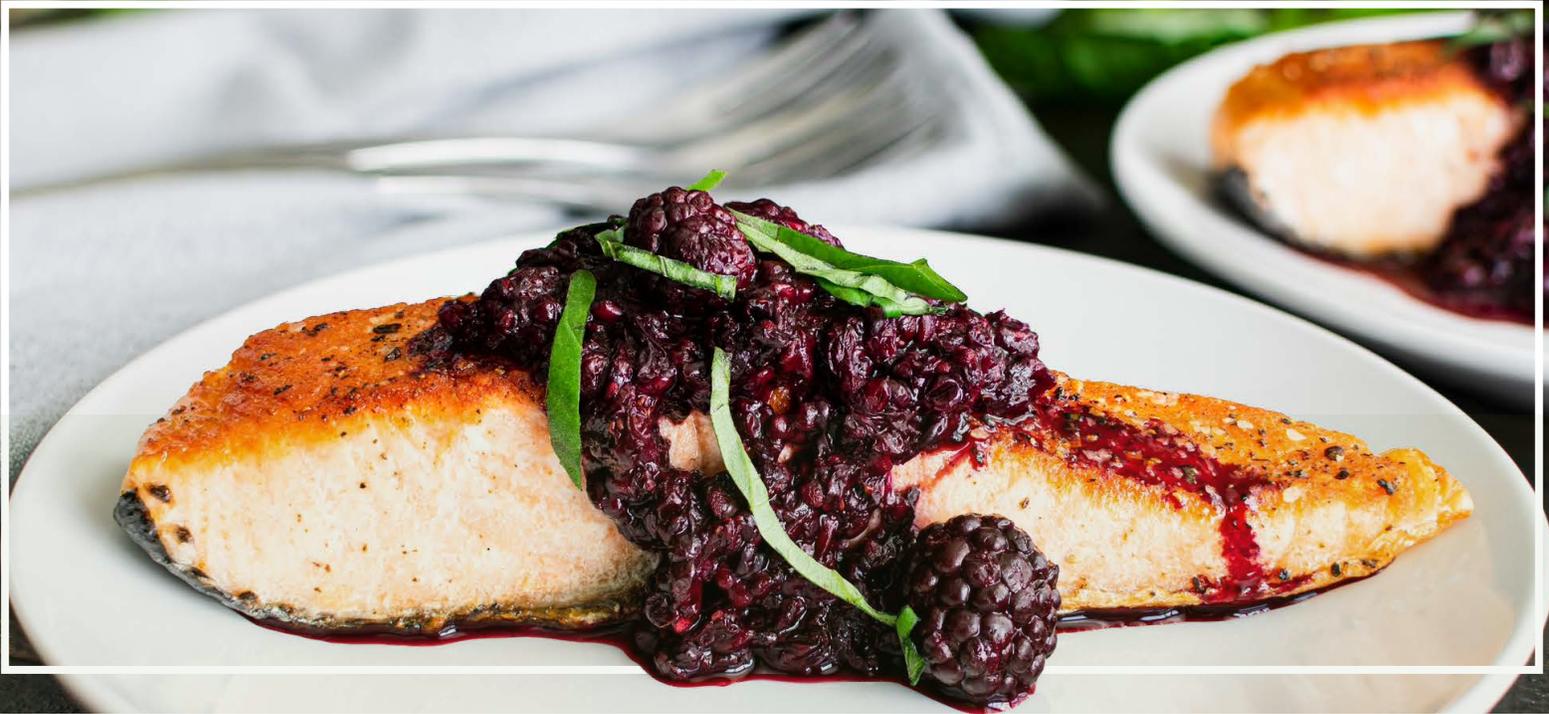
Did you know 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year? The 3 most common conditions are anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Adults with excess weight have a higher risk of developing [depression](#) in their lifetime. Having a mental disorder can also lead to unhealthy coping eating patterns or lack of energy to exercise.

It is well known that the Mediterranean diet improves one's physical health. A recent study found the Mediterranean diet to improve one's mental health and is associated with lowering depressive symptoms. The [Mediterranean diet](#) is a mixture of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, plant-based protein, and fish. Good nutrition can prevent mental health conditions from developing or worsening and conversely, good mental health can help prevent and manage diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Follow these tips to nurture your mental and physical health:

- Eat healthy and balanced meals: Have plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your meals.
- Stay hydrated: Drinking water can help boost your focus during the day.
- Get regular exercise: 30 minutes of exercise can help improve your mood and health. Go on walks during your break!

For more information, visit [here](#).



Coastal Blackberry Salmon Salad

Serves: 2

Cook time: 35 minutes.

Ingredients

- 3 cups Blackberries
- 3 tablespoons Balsamic Vinegar (optional)
- 1 1/2 tablespoons Maple Syrup
- 2 Wild Salmon fillets (3oz. each)
- 1/2 cup Spinach or Claytonia Perfoliate
- 1/4 teaspoon Sea Salt (optional)
- 3/4 teaspoon Black Pepper (optional)
- 1/2 cup Feta Cheese crumbled
- 3/4 cup Walnuts chopped

Directions

1. Prepare a small pot over medium heat. Wash produce items before use.
2. Add 1 cup of blackberries, balsamic vinegar, and maple syrup to small pot. Mash blackberries as they become heated. Simmer sauce for 15 minutes and remove from heat. Sauce will thicken as it cools.
3. Prepare to grill salmon fillets. Oil the grill. Wash and pat salmon dry. Lightly coat salmon with olive oil cooking spray and sprinkle with salt and pepper (optional). For best quality and to prevent flaking, use a fish grill basket.
4. Grill salmon covered for 7-10 minutes, turning one time. Salmon is cooked when it flakes easily.
5. Put spinach greens on two plates. Top with the remaining blackberries, cheese, walnuts, and optional balsamic vinegar dressing. Place grilled salmon on top and cover with blackberry sauce.

VISION

Quality health for all.



MISSION

In partnership with the community, deliver sustainable and responsive services that promote population health and equity.

GOALS

Promote quality, equity, and value.
Ensure the HCA's sustainability.
Offer relevant services to the community.



CONNECT WITH US

The **What's Up newsletter** is created and distributed monthly by HCA Communications. We welcome your ideas, input and/or insight into HCA people and programs. To contribute, comment or connect please email us at hcacomm@ochca.com or call (714) 834-2178. You can follow us on social media by clicking below.



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