

Dealing with Extended Sheltering During COVID-19

By Ed O'Neil, PhD, MPA

Upheaval has become a way of life over the past five months. As we are all living through it, I'm sure you need no litany of the changes. But what I have noticed over the past several weeks is that people are getting tired, which is understandable for several reasons.

First, I think many responded back in February with an adrenaline rush to the fear, challenge, and need we saw all around us. As helpful as this sprint was at keeping the doors open for business, by closing the doors it is now apparent that the sprint has turned into a marathon, and the reserves are getting thin. This is also the time of year that many folks recharge. But this year vacations are cancelled, the kids have already been home for months, holiday traditions are cancelled, and managers who may usually cut some slack from Memorial to Labor Day allowing us the same, are in your bedroom waiting for you on a Zoom call. And this points to a final reason for this summer of our discontent: we have lost some of the space and time boundaries that have served us well by protecting us from others or guarding how we balance our private and public selves.

This is all very conceptual, but I think true. Here are some practical things that can help combat the challenges of extended sheltering time.

- 1. Don't stuff it all in** — We once had time to walk between meetings, so even the most overscheduled person had time to move around, get outside, or stop at the facilities. Now we **schedule** meetings to the minute at the top of the hour. Don't. If you are in charge, end the meeting at a quarter of the hour. If you are not setting the meeting, tell the organizer that you have a hard stop conflict at a quarter of (you needn't tell them the conflict is with your life).
- 2. Stop the knee jerk Zoom** — Zoom was always there, but now that we are apart, we're clinging to it like the gunnels of a lifeboat. Don't. Instead, remember that you can still call colleagues, text a quick check-in, or write a creative email — I even got a real letter from an old friend last week. These alternatives will help the growing Zoom fatigue.
- 3. Get outside** — I realize that for most of the country the climate is not all that conducive to being out in it (I'm spoiled in northern CA), but as you move away from Zooming for more calls, take them outside. Walk a bit and enjoy that other part of life.

About the Quick-Takes Series

This miniseries, part of the [Medicaid Leadership Exchange podcast](#), provides guidance to help Medicaid leaders during the COVID-19 crisis. The series, which includes companion videos and tip sheets, is developed in partnership with the National Association of Medicaid Directors and the Center for Health Care Strategies through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information, visit www.chcs.org/quicktakes.

4. **Schedule time away** — Yes, you were going to take that trip of a lifetime this summer, but as it turns out Italy will no longer let you in. So, the lake still wants you; the mountains are still sublime; and the beach, properly masked and distanced, is still beckoning. I've been pretty buttoned up in my bubble, but now is the time for all of us to safely get outside. Even day trips are a boost.
5. **Set boundaries** — We all need them, and, in the past, they existed naturally. We went to work. It was quitting time. We took time in the car to transition back home. These artifices are no longer there, but we still need some limits. It's up to you to work to set them with family and co-workers. It is a fool's errand to believe that we do not need sacred space and time for ourselves, our loved ones, and to do our work. Have those conversations now.
6. **Get some new routines** — It is not just the commute that is gone (the earth says thanks). There are numerous things we did to add joy to our lives, from the gym to the opera to dinner with a friend once a month, to adding a day to a business trip to visit family. Most of those things are now on hold. Instead, find some new things that you have always wanted to do or never thought of, and give them a try. And when you find something that grabs you, work it into your new routine to give your day some structure.

For many of us this, COVID Quarantine, will be one of the major disruptions of our lives. Individually and collectively we need to make the most of it and pivot to things that are novel and step forward.

About Ed O'Neil

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About the National Association of Medicaid Directors

The National Association of Medicaid Directors supports Medicaid directors in administering the program in cost-effective, efficient, and visionary ways that enable the over 70 million Americans served by Medicaid to achieve their best health and to thrive in their communities. To learn more, visit www.medicaiddirectors.org.

About the Medicaid Leadership Institute

The *Medicaid Leadership Institute*, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation led by the Center for Health Care Strategies, helps Medicaid directors develop the skills and expertise necessary to successfully lead their state programs in an ever-changing policy environment. To learn more, visit www.chcs.org/medicaid-leaders.