

Policy and Procedure	Date Issued 10/1/12	Section	Policy Number	Page 1
Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division  Community Services Branch	Date Revised	Subject: Winter Weather Policy and Procedure- for TCM and CSP Providers		

## 1. POLICY:

It is the policy of the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division (BHD) to recognize the vulnerability of consumers to hypothermia resulting from exposure to cold and inclement weather. Hypothermia is a life threatening condition when a person's body temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. We recommend that all consumers be educated regarding the cold weather, assessed for vulnerability, and protected during inclement weather. The hypothermia season typically extends from November 1 to March 31, and may be expanded if hypothermia conditions occur before or after this season. Additionally, inclement weather could inhibit a consumer's ability to readily access treatment and care from their care providers. It is the expectation of the BHD that agencies prepare adequately for such events so that disruptions to treatment are minimized.

## 2. PROCEDURE:

1. All agency program staff will be educated on the methods for preventing hypothermia and the need to be able to make determinations about when to call for emergency personnel. They must know how to act, and act quickly, to intervene when symptoms of hypothermia appear. Symptoms of hypothermia may include shivering, clumsiness, slurred speech, confusion, drowsiness, loss of consciousness, shallow breathing, and weak pulse. Additionally it should be noted some medications could increase the risk of hypothermia by limiting the shivering mechanism, including some psychiatric medications.
2. Staff will educate all consumers on the dangers of hypothermia, providing written and verbal information on how to prevent hypothermia, symptoms of hypothermia, and what to do if symptoms are present (i.e. who to call to receive immediate assistance).
3. Staff will assess all consumers' living environments for adequate heat as well as ensuring consumers have appropriate winter attire, including coats, boots, hats, and gloves. Additionally, staff will explore what options are available to the consumer to ensure there is no disruption with their utility services.
4. Staff will educate all consumers regarding the need for appropriate attire when they are out in the inclement weather and limiting the time of exposure to the elements.
5. For consumers who are homeless during the winter months, staff will provide information and referral for where a consumer can seek shelter during cold and inclement weather.
6. With each consumer's assistance, staff will identify family members, neighbors, or friends of the consumer who are willing to act as an emergency contact to help monitor the consumer's health during cold and inclement weather. Staff will include the names and phone numbers of these emergency contacts in the agency's on-call book.
7. Consumers will acknowledge receipt of cold and inclement weather education by signing a Winter Weather Harm Reduction form (**See attachment 1**) on an annual basis beginning September 1 and completed no later than October 15th. This form will be placed in the consumer's medical record.
8. Staff will identify consumers at highest risk because of their behaviors (e.g. sell their winter attire, exhibit poor judgment by standing outside for long periods of time, or do not dress appropriately for the weather). The case managers will provide names of high-risk consumers to the on-call case manager.

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9. In preparation for a cold or inclement weather emergency, including if it falls on a holiday or weekends, the case management team will create a contingency plan to ensure there is no disruption in services for the consumer. During a cold or inclement weather emergency, case managers will make daily face to face or phone contact with those consumers identified as high risk. At these contacts, the consumer will be assessed for hypothermia, encouraged to stay warm indoors, encouraged to dress appropriately for the weather, and to seek heated shelter. If staff is unable to communicate with the consumer, their emergency contacts will be asked to assist in a welfare check. The police and/or paramedics may be contacted for welfare checks if unable to communicate with the consumer or their emergency contact.

**Attachment 1: Winter Weather Harm Reduction Form**

Reviewed & Approved by:



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Adult Community Services Branch