NJ Human Services Launches COVID Crisis Counseling Helplines for Health Care Workers, Emergency Responders

New Helplines Bolster Response to COVID-19 Emotional Well-being and Mental Health Concerns

Dec. 21, 2020

(TRENTON) – Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson today announced the Department has launched two new helplines in partnership with Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care to provide emotional support and crisis counseling to health care workers and first responder impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our doctors, nurses, frontline hospital staff, first responders, and nursing home workers are risking their lives every day in this battle against COVID. Each day while caring for our families, they worry about the health and well-being of their own families. They have seen far too much heartbreak and tragedy, and we want to be sure that they have a safe place to talk about their experiences, anxieties and trauma,” Commissioner Johnson said. “The COVID Hope and Healing Helplines for health care workers and first responders are here to help. Please do not hesitate to make the call.”

The HEAL NJ Healthcare Workers COVID Hope & Healing Helpline can be reached at **1-833-416-8773**. It offers live support for doctors, nurses, hospital staff and all other health care personnel by trained crisis counselors and health care peers from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, with emergency support available 24/7. The helpline can also provide connection to other resources, including telehealth crisis counseling, virtual support groups, and wellness webinars. To learn more and register for online webinars and support groups, please visit www.healhealthcareworkers.com.

The RISE: NJ First Responders COVID Hope & Healing Helpline for law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS professionals and others can be reached at **1-833-237-4325**. It offers live support from specialists and peers daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with emergency support available 24/7. Available support also includes crisis counseling, virtual support groups, and resiliency and wellness webinars. To learn more about RISE and register for online support groups and webinars, please visit www.risefirstresponders.com.

All specialists on both lines are trained in the crisis counseling model of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

The new helplines are being launched in partnership with Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care and funded by $1.7 million in federal funds awarded to the Department of Human Services from FEMA and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to support behavioral health services and expand crisis counseling during the COVID-19 crisis. Additional awardees supporting mental health outreach and support to communities across the state are detailed below.

“Support is available and we urge people who are struggling or just want to anonymously talk to someone who appreciates the challenges they face during this pandemic to reach out,” said Human Services Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke, who directs the Department’s Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services. “Our Hope and Healing Crisis Counseling Program has initiated these programs, which are needed more now than ever before. Please call if you need help or just want a supportive ear.”

Human Services also provides the NJ MentalHealthCares helpline at **866-202-HELP (4357**), which operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. All members of the general public are invited to call and talk with a trained specialist about emotional or mental health concerns. The line can also be reached by texting **NJHOPE to 51684**.

“These resources enable us to implement critically-needed mental health support and are another example of the strength of New Jersey’s partnership with both FEMA and SAMHSA,” said Adrienne Fessler-Belli, director of the Disaster and Terrorism Branch within DMHAS.

An American Sign Language video mental health help line for deaf and hard of hearing individuals is also available at **973-870-0677**.

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