Maine DHHS Launches StrengthenME Initiative to Help Maine People Cope With Stress of the Pandemic

October 22, 2020

AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Health and Human Services announced today the launch of StrengthenME (//strengthenme.com/) , an initiative to help Maine people cope with the stress and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing free tools, support, and community connections that promote wellness, resilience, and recovery.

StrengthenME is funded by nearly $5 million through a joint grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Maine DHHS announced (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2679006&v=dhhs_article_2020) in June that the Department would use $1 million from the first round of this funding to develop the initiative. DHHS was awarded $3.7 million in the second round of funding to extend this project over a longer term, recognizing that public health emergencies have both immediate and long-term psychological impacts.

Through StrengthenME, DHHS is collaborating with a coalition of community organizations and agencies to offer free stress management, wellness and resiliency resources to anyone experiencing emotional challenges in response to the pandemic.

If you or someone you know is looking for support, call (207) 221-8198, seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. StrengthenME is free, confidential, anonymous, and available to anyone in Maine.

"The stress of the global pandemic at the local level - on individuals, families and communities is real," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "If you need someone to talk to, information about resources available in your community, or you're concerned about the well-being of a friend or loved one, please call. StrengthenME is here for you."

StrengthenME is supporting the NAMI Teen Text line, expansion of the Intentional Warm Line, and a behavioral health marketing campaign. Additionally, the Maine DHHS Office of Behavioral Health is contracting throughout the state with provider agencies for Community Health Workers (CHWs), regional crisis support, and therapists with specialization in serving populations such as older Mainers and people of color.

"Community Health Workers are trusted community members with compassion and dedication in helping New Mainers during these tough times," **said Abdulkerim Said, Executive Director of the New Mainers Public Health Initiative**. "CHWs reach out to community members who are affected by COVID-19 to give emotional and peer support. CHWs' ability of speaking multiple languages is allowing them to reach community members who speak up to ten languages in the Lewiston and Auburn area."

StrengthenME also includes the FrontLine WarmLine (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2417012&v=dhhs_article_2020) , a phone support service that provides Maine's essential health care workers, first responders, and school staff (//mainedoenews.net/2020/10/05/media-release-maine-frontline-warmline-now-available-to-support-maine-school-staff/) with help in managing the stress of providing essential services during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The FrontLine WarmLine is intended specifically for these groups and is available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., 7 days a week by calling (207) 221-8196 or texting the word "frontline" to 898-211.

StrengthenME builds on the Mills Administration's support for behavioral health providers during the pandemic. DHHS has awarded $8.5 million (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2734261&v=dhhs_article_2020) in federal funds to support children's behavioral health, paid enhanced rates through MaineCare to certain providers that have incurred additional expenses due to a COVID-19 outbreak, and encouraged providers to apply for federal Medicaid support for providers that have experienced revenue losses and/or increased costs during the COVID-19 pandemic. DHHS has also encouraged behavioral health providers to apply for the Maine Economic Recovery Grant Program (//www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/governor-mills-announces-phase-2-maine-economic-recovery-grant-program-funding-expanded-pool) through the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. The grant program is now in Phase 2 with adjusted eligibility criteria and will accept applications through Thursday, October 29. The DHHS Office of Behavioral Health has also facilitated other payment support and flexibility, provided guidance on pandemic response, and engaged frequently with providers throughout the public health emergency.

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