Nearly $1 million in federal funds will help Maine people cope with psychological impacts of COVID-19

June 10, 2020

AUGUSTA – The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will use nearly $1 million in federal funding awarded this week for a program to help Maine people cope with the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, through both direct support for individuals exposed to the virus and proactive outreach aimed at reducing the long-term behavioral health impacts of the pandemic.

Individuals are increasingly reaching out for behavioral health support in the face of the pandemic. Maine's Intentional Warm Line, which offers non-crisis peer support to adults, has received more than 6,000 calls since March 30, 2020, an increase of 40 percent. Call duration increased 60 percent over the same period to an average of nearly 22 minutes.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on not only peoples physical health, but also their mental health and emotional well-being,"**said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. This funding will support additional boots on the ground to help those in Maine facing behavioral health challenges now and to prevent post-COVID challenges in the long-term.

"There are immediate behavioral health impacts from this pandemic as well as potential long-term effects as people grapple with disruption, isolation, traumatic experiences, grief, and economic instability", **said Dr. Jessica Pollard, Director of the DHHS Office of Behavioral Health.** These funds will support our work to proactively help Maine people cope with this distress and support their health during the pandemic as well as when it is over."

DHHS will use $989,045 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to:

- Contract with behavioral health providers and organizations to offer crisis counseling to individuals diagnosed with COVID-19, close contacts of such individuals, and people living or working in an outbreak setting. Community health workers will be trained to provide psychological and emotional support, assessment and case management, and facilitate connections to Maine CDC contact tracers. Behavioral health providers will stand ready to offer additional support to individuals with more significant psychiatric needs. This work supplements the ongoing work of Maine CDCs Behavioral Health Response Team, whose trained volunteers have been responding to outbreak settings to help minimize the impacts and support those affected.
- Launch a public awareness campaign offering information on expected emotional reactions to public health emergencies, building resilience and coping skills, knowing what warning signs to watch for, and when and how to seek help. While the campaign will serve the general public, it will target those with pre-existing behavioral health conditions, first responders and health care workers, and those experiencing significant economic impacts from the pandemic.
- Support the Maine Frontline Warmline (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2417012&v=dhhs_article_2020) for first responders and health care workers, NAMI Maines Teen Text Support Line (//www.namimaine.org/page/teentextline) , bolster the Intentional Warm Line (//www.sweetser.org/intentional-warm-line-staffed-for-covid-19-response) , and add Psychological First Aid as a service accessible through Maines 211 system (//211maine.org/) .

Maine DHHS also will assess the behavioral health needs of various communities, including people of color such as new Mainers, Tribes, first responders, and health care workers, to determine how best to direct future resources. DHHS plans to apply for a second round of federal funding to extend this project over a longer term, recognizing that public health emergencies have both immediate and long-term psychological impacts.

The Maine Emergency Management Agency is the direct recipient of this award and will transfer the funds to DHHS.

Visit the Maine DHHS Office of Behavioral Health for mental health and substance use disorder information and resources available during the pandemic at: www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/coronavirus.shtml (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/coronavirus.shtml) .

Helplines:

- 24/7 Statewide Crisis Line 888-568-1112
- 24/7 Intentional Warm Line 866-771-9276

- 24/7 Suicide Hotline 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)
- 24/7 Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746
- Maine FrontLine WarmLine for health care workers and first responders: 221-8196, free, confidential support 8am-8pm, 7 days a week
- NAMI Maine Teen Text Support Line (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/samhs/documents/for-public/Teen-Text-Support-Line-Instagram-Graphic.png) 515-8398 (TEXT)
- 211 and 211maine.org (//211maine.org/)

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