News And Outreach

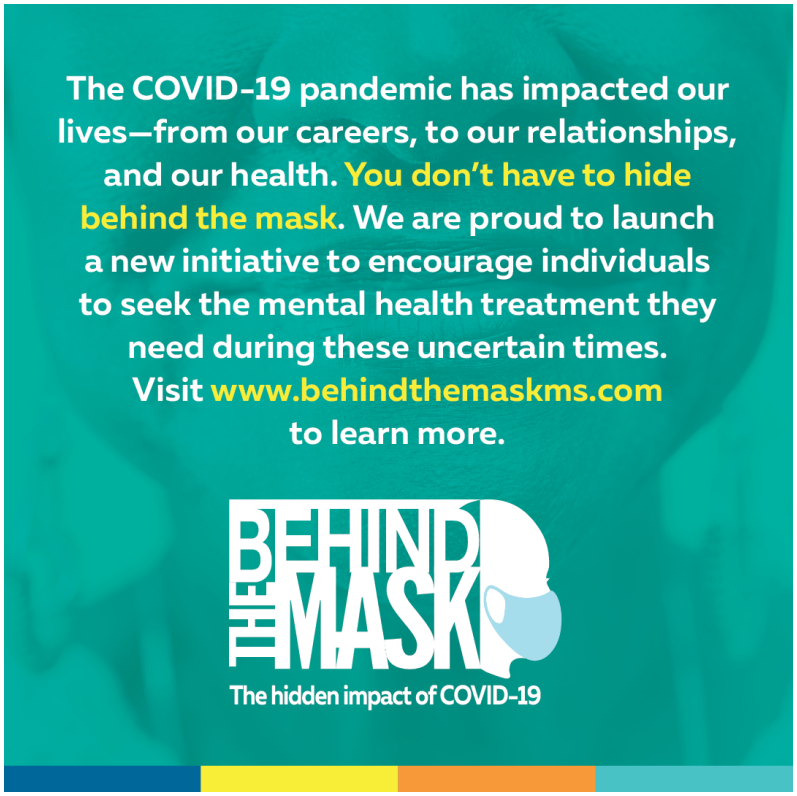
DMH Announces ‘Behind The Mask’ Campaign To Bring Services To More Mississippians During Pandemic

(Jackson, Miss.) – The Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) announced today a new awareness campaign titled “Behind the Mask” to promote mental health services for Mississippians during the COVID-19 pandemic. The statewide campaign will be customized at the local level for Community Mental Health Centers and DMH Certified Providers.

As the world continues to experience the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, more individuals may find themselves experiencing increased stress. Fears about health, widespread changes to employment, unemployment, increased caregiving responsibilities and home learning for school-age kids are among the top contributors to increased stress during the pandemic.

This campaign is designed to encourage individuals facing mental health problems not to hide “behind the mask,” but to seek help for their mental health problems, to understand that the pandemic has affected all kinds of people around the state, and to realize that these issues are common.

“Mental health problems are much more common than many people realize, and the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately been harmful for so many Mississippians’ mental health,” said Wendy Bailey, Deputy Executive Director for Administrative Services at DMH. “We reach out for help when we have physical health problems, and we should do the same for mental health problems. We hope this campaign encourages everyone to know resources are available. It may only take one call or one click on a computer screen to find the services you need.”



The Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) is addressing these immediate needs through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to address mental health, alcohol, and drug addiction problems as a result of COVID-19 among the most vulnerable residents of Mississippi, including healthcare workers. Grant funding, dubbed MERC-19 (Mississippi Emergency Response to COVID-19), was distributed to 15 mental health providers statewide through an application process. The new "Behind the Mask" campaign will now be used to encourage people to reach out to their regional mental health providers for help.

MERC-19 is using a three-pronged approach to increase care for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), severe emotional disturbance (SED), substance use disorder (SUD), and / or co-occurring disorder (COD) while also improving current services to frontline workers directly battling the physical, mental, and emotional effects of the pandemic.

The three-pronged approach operates as follows:

1. It will allow Mississippi to provide community-based services with an emphasis on remote, telehealth offerings for a variety of feasible mental health, alcohol and drug treatment, and co-occurring disorder services.
2. It will allow Mississippi to facilitate the growth of sustainable tele-medication-assisted treatment (MAT) capacities throughout the state with particular attention to socially isolated current or prospective MAT clients located in remote rural areas.
3. It will allow Mississippi to support the proactive provision of mental health and alcohol and drug treatment services to healthcare professionals, crisis hotline workers, and first responders who have themselves experienced trauma due to their efforts combatting COVID-19.

Fifteen providers are offering services through the MERC-19 grant in the state (see list below). Whether individuals have sought assistance in the past, have never worked with a mental health provider before, or have never felt the need to do so until now, the regional locations will address each person's individual needs.

The participating providers and the counties they serve are listed below:

1. Region 1 Community Mental Health Center (Coahoma, Quitman, Tallahatchie, Tunica)

2. Lifecore Health Group (Benton, Chickasaw, Lee, Itawamba, Monroe, Pontotoc, Union)
3. Region IV Mental Health Services (Alcorn, DeSoto, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo)
4. Life Help (Attala, Bolivar, Carroll, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Leflore, Montgomery, Sharkey, Sunflower, Issaquena, Washington)
5. Community Counseling Services (Choctaw, Clay, Lowndes, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Webster, Winston)
6. Region 8 Mental Health Services (Copiah, Lincoln, Madison, Rankin, Simpson)
7. Hinds Behavioral Health Services (Hinds)
8. Weems Mental Health Services (Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, Smith)
9. Pine Belt Mental Healthcare Resources (Covington, Forrest, Greene, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Wayne)
10. Gulf Coast Mental Health Services (Hancock, Harrison, Stone)
11. Singing River Services (George, Jackson)
12. Warren-Yazoo Behavioral Health Services (Warren, Yazoo)
13. The Friendship Connection (Statewide)
14. Born Free/New Beginnings (Statewide)
15. Harbor House (Statewide)

Interested individuals are encouraged to visit the Behind the Mask page online at www.behindthemaskms.com.

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DMH is supporting a better tomorrow by making a difference in the lives of Mississippians with mental illness, substance use disorders and intellectual or developmental disabilities one person at a time.

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It is the policy of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health to comply with federal and state laws assuring equal opportunities of employment and services.

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