Michigan's COVID-19 Hotline Now Offers Free, Confidential Emotional Support Counseling

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LANSING, MICH. Confidential emotional support counseling is now available 24/7 at no cost to Michiganders who call the state's COVID-19 hotline. The service is part of a **federally funded grant program** implemented by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration (BHDDA) in partnership with the Michigan State Police.

Callers to the COVID-19 hotline will hear a recording that begins by saying to press "8" if they would like to speak with a Michigan Stay Well counselor. The counselors, though not licensed professionals, have received specialized training from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's (SAMHSA) Disaster Technical Assistance Center on how to provide emotional support to residents of federally declared disaster areas. A major disaster was declared in Michigan on Friday, March 27, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BHDDA hopes that adding Stay Well counseling services to the hotline will provide callers with relief from the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Emerging or lingering anxiety, distress, irritability and loss of hope are important feelings to recognize in ourselves and others, and it can help to talk to someone," said Dr. Debra Pinals, psychiatrist and MDHHS medical director for behavioral health. "If it's helpful, the counselors can also provide callers with referrals to local mental health agencies and substance use disorder support services."

"Because of COVID-19, many of us are grappling with strong emotions, including anxiety, depression and fear," said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. "We want Michiganders to know it is okay to have these feelings – and okay to ask for help. You don't have to carry this burden alone."

Michigan Stay Well counselors are available any time, day or night, by dialing the COVID-19 hotline at 888-535-6136 and pressing 8 when prompted. Language translation is available f non-English speakers.

State employee volunteers also continue to answer general COVID-19 questions on the hotline. The current hours for general questions are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

To access a variety of emotional support resources in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, visit **Michigan.gov/StayWell**.

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at **Michigan.gov/Coronavirus** and **CDC.gov/Coronavirus**.

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