FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: April 1, 2020
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DPHHS Announces Expansion of Mental Health Resources to Help Montanans During COVID-19

Hours expanded for Warmline; resources increased for Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and THRIVE

Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Director Sheila Hogan announced today an expansion of mental health services to help Montanans who may be experiencing a range of emotions including loneliness, sadness and fear as a result of the current COVID-19 situation.

"We continue to monitor and make adjustments as necessary to meet the needs of Montanans during this challenging time," Hogan said. "While we are focused on limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our state, we must also not forget the mental health needs of our friends and neighbors. Please help us connect people to resources that are available."

Hogan said due to a surge in calls, DPHHS has increased availability to the Montana Warmline by offering extended hours from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Friday and 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday to help fill additional needs brought on by COVID-19. The Montana Warmline is operated by Mental Health America of Montana and during this time, DPHHS has increased their funding by $20,000 to accommodate increased staffing.

The Montana Warmline is a free, confidential service staffed by individuals with lived experience who understand the behavioral health needs of individuals. The service provides early crisis intervention with emotional support that can prevent a crisis. The Warmline is available at 877-688-3377 or at http://montanawarmline.org/

"This has been a valuable service over the years, and now Montanans are finding it very helpful as they work through their mental health needs," said Hogan.

She said the Warmline is **not** a crisis line. However, responders often refer people who are in crisis to appropriate services.

Hogan said the Warmline has been in existence since 2009 and is designed for Montanans who may need mental health support. "It provides a friendly and understanding person for those who just need someone to talk to," she said. It is not online therapy.

The Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) is also available. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress. Hogan said DPHHS added more resources to this service in 2019 to improve the call centers' capacity to handle the increased demand, and is now adding $75,000 due to increased calls.

In a one-year period between 2018 and 2019, there was a 43% increase in calls to Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the second highest increase in the country. "We know the Lifeline has been used more and more by Montanans, and it's important that people are aware of it," Hogan said.

The Montana Crisis Text Line, which can be accessed by texting "MT" to 741741, is available as well. The Text Line has been available to Montanans since 2016. When a person texts the Text Line, a counselor responds within minutes and is available for any behavioral health crisis. Montanans have increased use of this service with a 105% increase in number of texts over the past two years.

DPHHS has also allocated additional funds to Thrive by Waypoint Health, online cognitive behavioral therapy for those actively working to manage anxiety and stress. DPHHS is providing an additional $25,000 dollars for more licenses to the research-proven program.

“The cognitive behavioral skills can be an incredibly effective tool to reduce long-term anxiety and depression,” said Matt Kuntz of the Center for Mental Health Research and Recovery at Montana State University. “We're delighted to have an online self-help tool available to teach those skills in people's home.”

THRIVE has been supported by DPHHS since 2017 and it has helped 750 Montanans during this time.

Access to THRIVE and other resources can be found at dphhs.mt.gov.