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MDHHS launches media campaign promoting free mental wellness counseling; Campaign acknowledges COVID-19 distress, urges Michiganders "Be Kind to Your Mind"

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LANSING, Mich. – Mental health experts at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) are launching a statewide media campaign this week urging residents to seek relief from COVID-19-related emotional distress by talking to a trained crisis counselor and learning about other help available.

The “Be Kind to Your Mind” campaign promotes the use of Michigan’s free, confidential Stay Well counseling line, and aims to combat stigma associated with seeking help for feelings of depression, anxiety, anger or loss – all common during a disaster like COVID-19.

The Stay Well counseling line debuted on May 13, and is staffed with crisis counselors 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Callers can access the line by dialing Michigan’s COVID-19 hotline at 888-535-6136 and pressing “8” at the prompt. The service is part of a federally funded grant program implemented by the MDHHS Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration in partnership with the Michigan State Police.

“Many of us are having a hard time right now,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “There should be zero shame and zero stigma – just honesty that can help each of us find our own inner strength. ‘Be Kind to Your Mind’ says you can talk about the strain from COVID with trained counselors who are available for free if you call 888-535-6136 and press 8, or visit Michigan.gov/StayWell.”

According to a recent online survey of 99,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, more than one-third of American adults report symptoms of depressive and/or anxiety disorder—triple the rate reported in 2019. Another survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control in June found more than one in 10 U.S. adults had considered suicide in the past 30 days. That rate was more than double what was reported in 2019.

“Stay Well counselors help people understand their feelings and reactions during a disaster like the COVID-19 pandemic,” said psychiatrist Dr. Debra Pinals, MDHHS’ medical director for behavioral health. “While they are not licensed mental health professionals, they have undergone training provided by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration on how to help people mentally rebound from disasters.

Pinals said the Stay Well counselors are taught to listen, not judge, and help callers develop coping strategies, review their options and connect with agencies that may help them. All of this can reduce callers’ stress and improve their ability to endure the realities they face, she said.

According to a report prepared by the Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration grant team, callers to the Stay Well line are experiencing a range of emotions. They are anxious about contracting the coronavirus, having a loved one contract the virus and keeping their children and/or parents safe. They are discouraged about continued unemployment, worried about going back to work in an unsafe environment, and lonely due to lack of social interaction. Many callers expressed gratitude for being able to talk to someone who was objective and non-judgmental.

Language translation is available for non-English-speaking residents who call the counseling line.

“This service is one of the many steps MDHHS has taken to support the public’s behavioral health during these stressful and uncertain times,” said Allen Jansen, MDHHS Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration senior deputy director. “COVID-19 has impacted most everyone’s mental health in one way or another, and we are here to help.”

To access other mental health resources for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, visit Michigan.gov/StayWell.

# # #

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- E-license - Renew Health Professional License Online!
- Medicaid Provider Manual
- Verify Health Professional License
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Elizabeth Hertel
@MDHHS_Director

We have said all along that the vaccine would help us return to a sense of normalcy and today we announce that day is here. #MIDoseofHope https://twitter.com/GovWhitmer/status/1405598054284148741

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Stay Smart. Stay Safe. @MichiganHHS reports today, June 17, 2021, 172 new COVID-19 cases & 20* deaths. For * details bit.ly/2KcnkrO. Michigan's total cases are now 893,002 & 19,598 deaths. Find the latest data & #COVID19 news at

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