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NCDHHS

NCDHHS Awarded $1.5 Million to Expand Mental Health Supports through Statewide Crisis Counseling Program, Adding Focus on Historically Marginalized Communities

Raleigh, N.C.

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has been awarded $1.5 million to support and expand the Hope4NC program, which connects North Carolinians to mental health supports that help them cope and build resilience during times of crisis.

“COVID-19 is taking a toll on the mental health and overall wellness of North Carolinians. Anxiety and depression and other behavioral health issues are on the rise,” said NCDHHS Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Kody H. Kinsley. “This will fund our Hope4NC program which provides a direct connection to individuals who are in crisis or seeking help on how to cope, stay healthy and build resiliency during these challenging times.”

The grant will fund the existing Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463) and enable a Crisis Counseling Program tailored for COVID-19, which will provide immediate crisis counseling services to individuals affected by the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis in all 100 North

Carolina counties. It is funded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in coordination with the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Historically marginalized populations throughout North Carolina have been hit hardest by this virus. The Hope4NC program, along with other efforts by the Department, is being intentionally designed to provide essential supports and better linkages to care for individuals in these communities. These related initiatives include hiring staff who represent these populations and those with high levels of cultural and linguistic competency as Community Health Workers and Certified Peer Support Specialists. The Hope4NC program will support underserved populations as part of these overall efforts, including making referrals for people who are in need of additional services.

“We know that we can’t just talk the talk when it comes to addressing health disparities and improving health equity during this public health crisis, but we have to walk the walk. Our priority focus on historically marginalized populations is evidence of our commitment to doing this better and making our system work better for all people,” said Deputy Secretary Kinsley.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, NCDHHS repurposed the existing Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463), which was originally created to support behavioral health needs of individuals following natural disasters. North Carolinians who call the Hope4NC Helpline talk with trained counselors who provide emotional support and share resources on building coping skills during times of crisis. This is a collaborative effort between NCDHHS, the state’s seven Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCOs), North Carolina Emergency Management and REAL Crisis Intervention Inc. Hope4NC Helpline began initial operations statewide in April, serving more than 1,000 individuals to date. These new funds will also support community-based crisis counselors to further expand the reach of the program.

The Hope4NC Helpline and the Crisis Counseling Program work in coordination with each other as helpline staff connect callers to community-based counselors. These counselors are hired locally throughout the state to provide additional resilience supports for all North Carolinians. The goal of this program is to proactively reach out to folks in their communities, eventually through a door-to-door program, though that aspect of the effort will be phased over time as physical outreach is balanced with current public health guidance. Crisis Counselors will leverage telehealth tools to supplement and complement more traditional proactive outreach.

The Hope4NC Helpline 1-855-587-3463 responds to calls day or night, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Additional resources and information on staying physically and mentally healthy can be found on the Managing Overall Health (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/about-covid-19/managing-overall-health) and Wellness Resources (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/about-covid-19/wellness-resources)

webpages on the NCDHHS COVID-19 website: covid19.ncdhhs.gov (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/). For more information about North Carolina's response to COVID-19, visit nc.gov/covid19 (https://www.nc.gov/covid19) .

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