New Grant Funding Expands Behavioral Health Support for Pandemic-Related Emotional Distress

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Contact: Lynn Sutfin, 517-241-2112

LANSING, MICH. A new federal grant will help the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration continue a crisis counseling program for Michigan residents experiencing mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The $1.9 million Regular Services Program: Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides funding for an additional nine months of crisis counseling activities begun under a previous, short-term FEMA grant. It also allows for statewide expansion of behavioral health outreach services previously focused only in the Detroit metro area.

“As the pandemic continues, we know Michiganders are suffering stress, anxiety, and depression because of COVID-19,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “This grant will help to sustain critical behavioral health counseling and referral services for our residents most in need of support.”

The new CCP grant will expand the current program by providing:

- **More trained crisis counselors available for free counseling**. In April, BHDDA launched the Michigan Stay Well crisis counseling line that can be reached by dialing the state’s COVID-19 hotline (888-535-3136) and pressing “8.” Nine new counselors will join the seven existing ones, providing 24-hour phone-based emotional support and referral information. In addition to answering crisis calls from individuals, Stay Well counselors will establish and lead support groups offering participants the benefit of shared experiences. Due to social distancing requirements, group sessions will be conducted online or by phone.
- **More outreach specialists**. Under the program, trained outreach specialists connect with members of COVID-19-vulnerable population groups to provide guidance for healthy coping. Existing outreach specialists will continue to serve seniors and older adults; children and families; healthcare providers and first responders; and people experiencing racial/ethnic health disparities. With the new grant funding, six additional outreach specialists will be hired to support these additional vulnerable populations:
    - Unemployed residents.
    - Homeless or housing-insecure individuals, including those in need of isolation housing due to COVID-19.
    - People with Substance Use Disorder and people using substances to cope with COVID19.
    - Immigrants/limited English-speaking residents.
    - School teachers and staff.
    - People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities/Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Outreach specialists will collaborate with neighborhood organizations and community mental health agencies in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Genesee, Kent and Muskegon counties, as well as other COVID-19 hot spots as they emerge to disseminate psychoeducational materials, tip sheets and guidance. This will include hosting educational webinars and virtual Town Hall events.

- **Expanded media reach**. An expansive media campaign will promote the program's services and resources using TV, radio, print, web and social media messaging to reach Michiganders adversely affected by COVID-19.

Other grant program partners include the Michigan Public Health Institute and Gryphon Place, a Kalamazoo-based crisis intervention call center.

For a menu of services and resources to help manage COVID-19 emotional distress, 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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