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PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Announces Crisis Counseling Assistance Program

Call 888-215-4920 for Assistance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

6/23/2020

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

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BOSTON — As part of its efforts to support the behavioral health needs of Massachusetts residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the availability of a new crisis counseling assistance program. The new program, MassSupport, is funded through a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) made available through the federal disaster declaration. Riverside Community Care is providing the crisis counseling under contract with the Department of Mental Health.

Riverside Trauma Center will deploy its trauma response and crisis intervention expertise in a statewide initiative to bring behavioral health resources, information, and referrals directly to individuals and communities. To reach MassSupport, anyone in the state can call 888-215-4920 to be connected with local support. Counseling is available in English and Spanish.

"The extraordinary challenges that the people of Massachusetts have faced over the last few months have been stressful for so many in various ways," **said Governor Charlie Baker.** "This crisis counseling assistance program will be another available resource for those who may need it, and we encourage anyone who is in need to call to receive crisis support."

"Essential workers in many industries, from medical professionals and first responders to grocery store workers, transit providers and so many others, have worked hard in challenging conditions throughout this crisis," **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** "While this program is open to anyone in the Commonwealth who needs support, we also remind our essential workers that this new resource is available to support their unique needs during this time."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals' mental health in different ways. We've emphasized the importance of checking in with loved ones and spending time

outside, and other ways to help cope," **said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders**. "This crisis counseling assistance program is another way that people experiencing stress, fear, isolation, and loneliness can connect with professional mental health support."

"It's a privilege to be able to partner with FEMA and Riverside Community Care to launch MassSupport. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a deep emotional toll, but challenging times present opportunities for collaboration. We're stronger together, we will heal, and this essential service will be a valuable tool in that journey," **said Department of Mental Health Commissioner Joan Mikula.**

"We are honored that FEMA and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health have called upon the Riverside Trauma Center to assist the citizens of the Commonwealth in coping with the behavioral health repercussions of the pandemic. Just as our team has helped people heal after critical incidents including the Boston Marathon bombing, we are prepared to offer resources, strategies, and comfort – as together, we face the effects of the pandemic," **said Scott M. Bock, Founder and CEO of Riverside Community Care.**

"This crisis counseling assistance is one of the important programs that the Commonwealth requested, and received under the FEMA Major Disaster Declaration," **said Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Samantha Phillips**. "MEMA continues to coordinate the disaster assistance programs including this Crisis Counseling Assistance and the FEMA Public Assistance Program to reimburse local governments, state agencies, and certain private non-profits as we continue to support longer-term recovery."

At the outset of the program, MassSupport will both support the Mass 2-1-1 call center and will deploy outreach counselors and clinicians to provide Psychological First Aid in the form of basic education and counseling around issues related to the pandemic, and assess high-risk individuals for mental health referrals. Future expansions include the provision of more crisis counseling for the lasting effects of the pandemic, community education on coping with ongoing stress and building emotional resilience, and assistance for people applying for services to relieve crisis-related burdens

To tailor assistance to the wide variety of needs representing diverse communities throughout Massachusetts, Riverside responders will gather input from local community and public health leaders, school personnel, and first responders; work with mental health providers to create networks and streamline referrals; and disseminate targeted information via outreach efforts and social media.

For additional information on the MassSupport program, please call 888-215-4920, or email **masssupport@riversidecc.org** (mailto:masssupport@riversidecc.org). Visit the web site at **www.masssupport.org** (http://riversidetraumacenter.org/our-services/masssupport/).

The Crisis Counseling Program is one part of the Administration's work to support the behavioral health needs of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 14, the Administration **announced** (/news/new-resources-to-help-massachusetts-residents-cope-during-covid-19) a new awareness effort in conjunction with Senate President Karen Spilka to help people cope with social isolation. The campaign centered around "What If?," a new video promoting the power of reaching out and connecting with those who might be struggling to cope, and includes practical tips and resources at mass.gov/CopingDuringCOVID, including:

- Reaching out and engaging in virtual conversations
- Activities to stay mentally and physically active
- Joining a support group
- Calling 2-1-1 for help

The Massachusetts Network of Care is another resource available to Massachusetts residents during this time, providing a comprehensive, searchable online directory to help Massachusetts residents find information on behavioral health services and treatment in their communities. Network of Care Massachusetts includes a directory of over 5,000 programs and organizations across the Commonwealth, searchable by keyword and zip code. For each listing, users can find a program description and contact information, as well as information on populations served, relevant eligibility and fee information, and more. Learn more at **www.massachusetts.networkofcare.org** (https://massachusetts.networkofcare.org/mh/)

Residents can visit **www.mass.gov/covid19** (/covid19) for the latest information, call 2-1-1 with questions, and text "COVIDMA" to 888-777 to subscribe to text-alert updates.

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