



## Message from the Director

Dear DMH family,

With another summer in full swing, we continue our collective journey to a bit of normalcy and recovery from pandemic isolation. One of the most iconic representations of the life we once knew is the Olympic games, currently taking place in Tokyo, Japan. As I watch the competitions and have deep appreciation for our Olympic athletes championing mental health on the world stage, I cannot help but acknowledge that this Olympics and our current situation are still very far from normal. Our reality today is that COVID-19 is once again spreading quickly. Cases have increased rapidly over the past two weeks due to the Delta variant, which is more easily spread between people and is disproportionately affecting communities of color. In fact, the last time we saw cases rise as quickly was during the winter surge. One important difference is that today we have a defense: [highly effective vaccines](#). While many of us may have anxieties about vaccination, data and science show that vaccines are indeed safe. I encourage you to get vaccinated, and in doing so help speed us on our way to caring for one another, physically being with each other, and ensuring that well before the next Olympic games, we are settled together in a better normal—both mentally and physically.

At DMH, we are diligent in our work regardless of season. Recently, a new Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center (BHUCC) opened in the Antelope Valley (AV). The first of its kind in the AV region, the DMH BHUCC program will now provide 24-hour care for those experiencing mental health crises. In August, our dedicated, year-round partnership with L.A. County Office of Education will be put to the test as we assist our schools and educators prepare for the second back-to-school season during a global pandemic. We join our educational partners in caring for the social-emotional wellbeing of our youth and welcoming them back to school campuses.

With many plans afoot, we all have a duty to help pave the solid path to reopening. And while public health guidelines and reopening schedules will fluctuate accordingly, please adhere to safety recommendations and practice self-care. Endeavor healthy habits such as sleeping and eating well. When it is safe to do so and you are ready to venture out, I encourage you to move, walk and enjoy the great outdoors—many that are free and accessible right here in our L.A. County parks, beaches, and open spaces. It's no secret that connecting with the outdoors and exercising benefits your mental health. Likewise—and as our most elite athletes attest—the symbiosis

of a healthy mind and a healthy body is what promises wellbeing of the whole person.

Heart forward,

Jon

Jonathan E. Sherin, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director



## Maintaining Physical and Mental Wellbeing as COVID-19 Transmission Increases

While we have made progress against COVID-19 through L.A. County's [widespread vaccination program](#), the substantial number of people who are not yet vaccinated means that we are still at risk of COVID-19 outbreaks that can result in health complications and death, especially among underserved communities that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Getting vaccinated is the most important thing you can do to prevent getting COVID-19, stop its spread in the County, as well as avoiding serious illness in the rare occurrence of a post-vaccination infection. If you have questions about the vaccine, please review these [myths and facts](#) from the Department of Public Health and speak with your doctor about your concerns, and visit a [vaccination site or event](#) when you are ready to get vaccinated.

As cases and hospitalizations continue to climb, it is understandable to experience signs of distress – including fear, anxiety, depression, and frustration – in reaction to this news. To help prevent and mitigate this stressor's impact on you and your loved ones, we have compiled the following resources to help recognize distress symptoms, engage in self-care, and places to seek help when needed. These include:

- [iPrevail](#) platform that provides 24/7 support through trained peer specialists, online support groups, and digital learning programs.
- [Headspace](#) to access exercises to promote mindfulness, sleep, and physical activity.
- The [DMH+UCLA Public Partnership for Wellbeing's resources](#) for frontline workers, school staff, and care professionals.
- [Our web-based collection](#) of COVID-19 related mental health information and supports.

As always, you can receive live support 24/7 through our Help Line at (800) 854-7771 or by texting 'LA' to 741741. Stay up-to-date on L.A. County's ongoing response and recovery efforts at the [COVID-19 website](#).



## High Desert Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center Opens to Serve County Residents and Communities

This month, we have opened the High Desert Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center (BHUCC) in the Antelope Valley to provide care and support to County residents experiencing mental health crises. Operated by Star View Behavioral Health on LACDMH's behalf, this 9,900 square-foot center provides around-the-clock care to individuals age 13 and older affected by a psychiatric crisis. The center will provide services to individuals who voluntarily visit its crisis walk-in center, as well as those who come in on an involuntary 5150/5585 psychiatric hold. The High Desert BHUCC will also collaborate with our field response teams to evaluate and stabilize individuals from mental health-related crisis calls, reducing the burden on hospital emergency departments.

Services provided include evaluation, crisis stabilization, case

management, and linkage to community-based resources. Visit this [page](#) to learn more about the High Desert BHUCC and its services.



### **LACDMH Clinician Honored for Minority Mental Health Advocacy**

During the virtual celebration of the **Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Month**, [NAMI Urban Los Angeles](#) honored LACDMH Clinical Program Manager Belen Camacho Fuller for her advocacy work on behalf of underserved clients and communities.

*“I am so humbled for being honored . . . I do this work for the community because I love it. It’s in my heart, it’s in my passion. I don’t see myself turning my head on anyone in need. I believe it is my duty to do something to change the process for the better,”* said Camacho Fuller.

Recognized in July, Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Month was established in 2008 to elevate awareness of mental illnesses among underserved populations and to reduce their barriers to access mental health treatments, services, and resources. This [month-long recognition](#) was named in honor of Ms. Campbell, a journalist, author, and NAMI Urban Los Angeles co-founder who tirelessly advocated for diversity and inclusivity in mental health care, research, and education until her death in 2006.

In alignment with Ms. Campbell’s vision of better serving the mental health needs of diverse populations, the [U.S. Office of Minority Health](#) is promoting its free and accredited **“Improving Cultural Competency for Behavioral Professionals”** [e-learning program](#) to help mental health professionals build and sustain culturally- and linguistically-appropriate services.



## New Incubation Academy to Support “Care First, Jails Last” Initiative

L.A. County’s [Alternatives to Incarceration \(ATI\) Office](#) is launching an Incubation Academy for community-based organizations that can provide care-first treatments and alternatives. ATI is focused on diverting people away from the criminal justice system and into systems of care, support, and recovery, and building community-based organizations’ service capacity – including their ability to obtain governmental contracts – is vital to ATI and the County’s vision. The goal of the Incubation Academy is to increase supports and resources for communities and reducing at-risk individuals’ chances of becoming involved with the criminal justice system. The Incubation Academy will help organizations become service providers for ATI, including training, mentorship, funding, and technical assistance to help them develop and implement best practices in service delivery and business management.

Small- and medium-sized organizations with the capacity to provide housing, assessment, case management, and mental health/substance use disorder treatment services are encouraged to apply, especially those that already work with underserved communities or justice-involved individuals. For more information and to apply, visit the [ATI Incubation Academy website](#).

## Cultural Traditions and Connections

*The following poem is excerpted from [Cultural Traditions and Connections](#), a space featuring voices from LACDMH’s diverse communities.*

**“Parasite”** by Mishna Hernandez, Youth Community Member

That day  
in which I felt my smallest

I found a bit of strength.  
This Voice,  
this friend  
had never given me a choice  
and had come to depend  
on its control over my mind.  
I had to fight,  
but not alone.

I had to fight,  
but not alone.  
I looked for a light  
and now I'm deep in a battle zone.  
That Voice, like a parasite,  
finds a brand new lie.  
The enemy was food,  
and now it is life.  
Nothing will satisfy its appetite  
until I say goodbye  
before my time.  
Except now, I can not let it win  
It might succeed in a battle  
but I know where I've been  
and I'm no longer fragile.

(Read more of "[Parasite](#)" and articles from [Cultural Traditions and Connections](#).)

Thank you for taking the time to read and engage with this issue of  
**"Connecting Our Community,"** a monthly newsletter focused on the Los Angeles  
County Department of Mental Health's updates and priorities.

We welcome your comments, story ideas, and recommendations at  
[pio@dmh.lacounty.gov](mailto:pio@dmh.lacounty.gov) and you may adjust your subscriptions settings at this [link](#).

[dmh.lacounty.gov](http://dmh.lacounty.gov)

Let's get social @LACDMH!

