

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

February 2021



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH
hope. recovery. wellbeing.

Welcome to the debut issue of “Connecting Our Community,” our monthly newsletter highlighting our department’s news, updates, and resources for Los Angeles County residents and communities. We hope you find this month’s stories useful for promoting your wellbeing, and feel free to [contact us](#) with feedback, questions, and story ideas for future issues.



988 Implementation and Alternative Crisis Response

Los Angeles County is leading the way in preparing for the launch of 988 – the new number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – in summer 2022.

This week, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved two motions to improve LA County’s response to calls related to threats of suicide and mental health crises, as part of LA County’s Alternative Crisis Response (ACR) initiative focused on providing “care first” services to individuals experiencing health or human services emergencies.

The [first motion](#), co-authored by Supervisors Janice Hahn and Kathryn

Barger, directs the County to co-sponsor the Miles Hall Lifeline Act ([AB 988](#)) that formally establishes California's 988 Crisis Hotline Center.

The [second motion](#), authored by Supervisor Hahn, connects LACDMH's 24/7 Help Line with suicide prevention services provided by Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, allowing the two organizations to coordinate appropriate services – including crisis counseling and dispatch of mobile psychiatric teams – when responding to a mental health emergency.

"The Department of Mental Health salutes the Board for relentless efforts to help the County and its departments streamline complex processes and push for systems reform broadly," said Dr. Jonathan Sherin, Director of LACDMH. "The consolidation of our crisis response functions through the ACR initiative and the support for a dedicated Crisis Line (aka 988) in collaboration with our key partner, Didi Hirsch, are emblematic of our leadership and commitment to actions that make progress possible."

Until 988 goes live next year, please continue to use [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)'s current number at (800) 273-TALK (8255) if you or a loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis.



Furthering Our Grassroots Engagement

LACDMH's vigorous outreach and engagement efforts would not be possible without our community members, who are the true experts in our County's numerous and diverse neighborhoods. We are excited to share that these programs have been greatly expanded. In addition to

our robust Promotores network, we have recently launched the **Community Ambassador Network (CAN)** to expand our capacity throughout the County by informing and connecting communities with resources and services offered by LACDMH and its partners.

The CAN program hires, trains, and certifies community members to serve as lay mental health workers in their own neighborhoods, becoming trusted experts who can help make service linkages, assist with system navigation, and identify relevant resources for their community's wellbeing needs. This important program also provides much needed employment opportunities.

To date, we have identified funding for 197 Community Ambassadors and have worked with our community partners to fill 168 of those positions.

The CAN program also includes training for an equity-centered, trauma-informed approach to care, as well as advancement opportunities that further the ambassadors' role in our outreach, engagement, and prevention efforts. For more information about CAN, please check out this [fact sheet](#) or contact Wendi Tovey at wtovey@dmh.lacounty.gov.



Observing African American History Month

Nationally recognized in February, [African American History Month](#), also known as Black History Month, highlights African Americans' numerous contributions in our society and culture, including the generations of individuals and groups who fought to be recognized as full and equal citizens throughout America's history.

This month long observance takes on greater significance this year as our nation continues to struggle with systemic racism and racial inequities, including [disparities in mental health care and outcomes](#) among African Americans. In a recent "[Black Minds Matter](#)" panel discussion, Dr. Curley Bonds, LACDMH's Chief Medical Officer, joined other experts in highlighting unique and persistent wellbeing needs in the African American community. These include addressing racism and trauma while providing services, recruiting more African American mental health professionals, and keeping the anti-racism momentum going to generate and sustain lasting change for better care.

LACDMH is actively working to bridge these gaps through our outreach and services, particularly with stakeholder input from our Black and African Heritage Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) group. We have also compiled a collection of [racial equity resources](#) to use as a starting point for deeper examination and discussion.



View Our MHSa 3-Year Plan Preview Presentation on March 5

LACDMH will present a preview of the Fiscal Year 2021-24 Mental Health Services Act (MHSa) 3-Year Plan to our Community Leadership Team at their meeting on March 5, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. LACDMH experts will provide



Resources for Sharing

We have received many requests for information about [LACDMH resources](#) available to our County family and beyond. Flyers promoting these resources are available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) for your use as needed. They have been distributed across the County, including

program updates and data related to elements of the plan, with a critical focus on changes due to COVID-19.

Visit this [page](#) for more information and to observe the meeting online. A public meeting about the plan will be held in April and details will be provided as soon as they are available.

vaccination sites and food banks, to engage residents and communities with our services and resources.

Support is also available through our 24/7 Help Line at (800) 854-7771, and our continuing partnership with [Headspace](#) gives all County residents free access to its platform to promote mindfulness and wellbeing.

*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.

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