



## Message from the Director

Dear DMH family,

The recent events in Afghanistan and their mental health ramifications for our military community remind us that there are challenges beyond the pandemic. The painful emotions and spiritual crises our veterans may be experiencing are not surprising and are often termed moral injuries in the mental health field. To that end, those individuals and families who have committed a large portion of their lives to the mission in Afghanistan over the past two decades may be questioning their actions, their commanders, their country, and the sacrifices they made in serving. In this context, we must validate that these feelings are real and recognize that the key to our response is making sure that no one has to cope alone. Fortunately, the military community can receive help through DMH's [Veteran Peer Access Network \(VPAN\)](#) as well as a host of other in-person, online or telephone [resources](#).

Next week, National Suicide Prevention Month begins, and this year's theme of "[Supportive Transitions: Reconnect, Reenter, and Rebuild](#)" is particularly fitting given our year of turbulent changes, ongoing setbacks, and the many uncertainties we have endured and those that lie ahead. Our collective duty is to be more perceptive and empathetic than ever to support each other, our clients, and our collective through moments of crisis and transitions. I encourage you to attend our [virtual suicide prevention summit](#), share [our online resources](#), and further develop the skills to help those who are struggling. By staying connected to each other we can help the county as a whole thrive well beyond this pandemic.

Heart forward,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon".

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



## Addressing COVID-19 Vaccination Hesitancy

This week, the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine received full approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for people 16 years and older, while remaining on emergency use authorization for those 12 to 15 years old and for a third dose among certain immunocompromised individuals. We join the Department of Public Health in thanking the FDA for their thorough review and analysis of this vaccine's safety and effectiveness, and we encourage everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated.

"The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and remains the most powerful tool we have to both lower our risk of infection and protect against serious illness and death from COVID-19 if infected," said L.A. County Health Officer Dr. Muntu Davis. "I hope the milestone of this vaccine's full approval gives those that were waiting to get vaccinated the confidence to now take this important step."

We understand that there are numerous factors that can contribute to vaccine hesitancy such as anxiety, trypanophobia (fear of needles), experiencing trauma or distress as well as [misinformation and myths](#) about the vaccine. If you have doubts or questions about getting vaccinated, we encourage you to speak with your primary doctor or check reputable sources for vaccine information and updates, including California's [COVID-19 Hotline](#) at (833) 422-4255 and Public Health's [COVID-19 Vaccine page](#). We have also updated our [COVID-19 Mental Health Resources page](#) to include articles and information about vaccine hesitancy and how to identify and address those issues.

To further support your wellbeing as we continue to recover from the pandemic, please explore our collection of resources and services below:

- [iPrevail](#), which provides 24/7 support through trained peer specialists, online support groups, and digital learning programs.
- [Headspace](#) to access mindfulness, sleep, and movement exercises.
- The [DMH+UCLA Public Partnership for Wellbeing's resources](#) for frontline workers, school staff, and care professionals.

- Our [24/7 Help Line](#) at (800) 854-7771.



### Take Action for National Suicide Prevention Month

September is nationally recognized as National Suicide Prevention Month, and LACDMH will be partnering with numerous mental health organizations and campaigns – including [Know The Signs](#), [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#), [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), [Didi Hirsch](#), and many others – to raise awareness and inspire action for suicide prevention.

The highlight of this monthlong effort is the [11th Annual Suicide Prevention Summit](#) hosted by the Los Angeles County [Suicide Prevention Network](#). Taking place virtually over five days throughout September, this summit will share diverse perspectives, key insights, and evidence-based best practices to reinforce our shared goals of saving lives, supporting suicide attempt survivors, and helping those who have lost a loved one to suicide. This year's summit theme is "**Re-Envisioning The Journey Together**," and the events will focus on developing resilience, connection, intersectional allyship, and cultural humility.

We have also updated the LACDMH website with [Suicide Prevention Resources](#) for anyone seeking support for themselves or a loved one. We encourage you to seek help if you or a loved one is struggling with a mental health crisis or are having thoughts of suicide, including calling the [24/7 Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at (800) 273-8255, AFSP's [Lifeline Chat](#), or texting the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text 'LA' to 741741).



## Resources for Students, Families, and Staff During Back to School Season

To help L.A. County parents, students, and families manage stress and adjust to in-person learning during this back-to-school season, we have updated our [educational resources](#) to address mental health and wellbeing needs. Additionally, our DMH+UCLA Public Partnership for Wellbeing has assembled this [School Wellbeing Toolkit](#) to help educators and school staff address a variety of student wellbeing needs, whether in physical and/or remote classroom environments.

For additional resources to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of the school community as we resume in-person learning, visit the Los Angeles County Office of Education's ["All In" website](#), which highlights the different ways we can be "all in" to support students' and families' needs during this school year.



*Jennifer Duh, a LACDMH Speakers Bureau member, represents the Department on Sino-TV.*

## LACDMH in the News

Our ongoing efforts to promote mental health awareness and assist the most vulnerable among us continue to receive positive attention in the media. In case you missed it, check out some highlights of the excellent stories and representation by our experts:

- Dr. Sherin was featured on [KPCF-FM / LAist](#) and [KTLA-TV](#) about the mental health impact of the recent Afghanistan events on the military and veteran community and resources available to support their wellbeing.
- Jim Zenner, Director of LACDMH's Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN), was interviewed by the [U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs](#) for a story about the importance of VPAN's services.
- LACDMH [Speakers Bureau](#) and experts were interviewed by numerous media outlets – including KABC-TV, KNBC-TV, Univision, Estrella TV, World Journal, and SINO-TV – about supporting students' and families' wellbeing during back-to-school season.



We are excited about the installation of “Portals” at our new headquarters building at 510 S. Vermont Avenue. Created by artist [Amir H. Fallah](#) in collaboration with [Judson Studios](#), this public art features three large-scaled stained glass panels with references to Victorian, Korean, and Mid-Century Modern art styles – reflecting the diversity of Koreatown – along with botanical and entryway elements to symbolize transition, growth, and healing. We thank Amir, Judson Studios, and the [L.A. County Department of Arts & Culture](#) for their partnership to beautify our new home and to enrich the lives of our clients, staff, and visitors.



## Q YOUTH FOUNDATION

### Cultural Traditions and Connections

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

**“Community Care Network for Mental Health”** by Ana Y. Bernal, [LGBTQIA2-S UsCC](#) Member and Executive Director of Q Youth Foundation

A valuable intersection is missing as Mental Health Awareness Month and Pride Month ended and for some LGBTQIA2-S individuals, it is an in between time – where one fight ends, and another fight continues. But both struggles are never mutually exclusive of one another.

Since 2016, Q Youth Foundation has worked with Los Angeles LGBTQIA2-S community members by offering workshops to learn how to write their own stories as plays. The workshops have produced over 50 plays featuring fictional stories to autobiographical memoirs. In our workshops we have tackled many conversations about form and process in writing – but a recurring theme within the stories is trauma and stigma that have shaped characters and plays. As a result, our workshops subconsciously began to form a network of community care. The writing group realized that there is a prevalence of trauma in our stories, recognizing how trauma affects us as individuals and responded by addressing trauma in the creative practice of playwriting. We are creatives and not mental health professionals. However, through further research and development, we learned that we have engaged our community in a framework of Trauma-Informed Care.

I do consider us cultural and community organizers with the expertise of leading workshops and producing performances for audiences in Los Angeles. With Mental Health Awareness Month and Pride Month behind us, we continue to work with our community members in building brave spaces. Currently, we have produced accessible radio theater plays streaming on [Spotify](#) and [YouTube](#) platforms. To learn more about our current and ongoing projects, visit <http://www.qyouthfoundation.org>.

(Read additional 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)

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