

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

August 2022



Message from the Acting Director

Dear DMH family,

On July 1st I officially began my new role as the Acting Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. It is an honor to be able to serve the County in this capacity – especially to be able to serve our clients, and the thousands of dedicated DMH employees, partners, and allies who work on the front lines and behind the scenes to provide mental health services throughout our system of care. Some of you may know that I have been a part of the DMH family for many years – 34, in fact, on November 4th this year. I began my DMH career as a student in Skid Row, where I stayed for over 23 years working with people experiencing serious mental illness and homelessness. Most recently, I oversaw DMH’s clinical programs and community-based services as the Senior Deputy Director.

While we have always faced challenges in the mental health world, we now find ourselves at a particularly difficult crossroad where the demand for what DMH can offer is greater than ever, yet we find our resources (and ourselves) stretched thinner than ever. Going into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge to our psyches and emotions, just as much as it is a threat to our physical well-being. And as a society, we are constantly confronted with racial and social injustices, as well as the growing mental health crisis experienced by our youth. Sometimes, just as we feel we are making some progress, another hurdle hits. The challenges we face can seem like they are coming from every direction, and even the most optimistic among us can feel overwhelmed.

Especially during these times, I reflect on what I have experienced and learned from working at DMH. I have seen people triumph over impossible situations and come out on the other side in amazing ways. I worked with people in Skid Row who everyone else gave up on, but they were able to embark on journeys of recovery and completely turn their lives around. When you’ve been a witness to these things you learn that even when you can’t be optimistic, you can have hope.

Last week at our DMH internal town hall meeting, I asked our staff to join me in letting hope move us beyond the challenges and limitations we see around us, enabling us to do better and be greater than what we may even think we are capable of. And as each one of us takes this step, we help the person next to us do better and be greater, and that person goes on to help the one next to them. We are all interconnected in this DMH family, and we are stronger for it. Please join me as we venture forward to meet the needs of the clients, families, and communities of Los Angeles County who depend on us. The best is yet to come.



Dr. Lisa H. Wong



LACDMH Joined Didi Hirsch and Congressman Tony Cardenas to Showcase 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

LACDMH, Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, and Congressman Tony Cárdenas held a press conference to highlight the recently launched 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and discuss the need for long-term support for this lifesaving service.

During the event, attendees heard remarks from Congressman Cárdenas, LACDMH Acting Director Dr. Lisa Wong, and Didi Hirsch CEO Lyn Morris, and they also had an opportunity to check out LACDMH's [therapeutic transport van](#), which is a vital component of L.A. County's Alternative Crisis Response initiative by deploying unarmed clinicians, instead of law enforcement officers, for mental health crisis calls that do not impact public safety.

"There is no question that 988 is already saving lives here in Los Angeles and across the country," said Congressman Cárdenas. "But to truly meet this moment and carry forward the full potential of 988, we need to do more." Cárdenas highlighted U.S. Congress' H.R. 7116 (988 Implementation Act of 2022, which he introduced) and California's AB 988 as legislation that will help sustain and improve 988 and its related services.

You can learn more about both bills in this [press release](#) and view more photos from the press conference in this [Flickr album](#).



LACDMH Promoters Played Ball with L.A. Dodgers

Earlier this month, we partnered with the Dodgers to invite our mental health promoters for a special event to thank them for their outreach and educational work throughout L.A. County, especially in historically

underserved communities. During the event, our promoters and their loved ones had opportunities to tour Dodger Stadium, bat from the home plate, field balls in the outfield, and meet Dodger alums Manny Mota and Mickey Hatcher. We thank the Dodgers for extending this opportunity to our promoters and for their ongoing partnership to raise awareness of mental health issues.

LACDMH's United Mental Health Promoters program is focused on reducing stigma and increasing knowledge on mental health issues through community outreach, public education, and linkage to culturally- and linguistically-appropriate resources. Visit this [page](#) to learn more about this program or to request a promoter service.

View event photos on [Flickr](#).



LACDMH staff and Peer workers at our Service Area 4 Peer Resource Center (PRC). LACDMH currently operates 4 PRCs throughout the County (in Service Areas 2, 4, 6, and 7) and plans to open one in each Service Area in the near future.

Scholarships Available for Peer Certification Applicants

The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) has begun its [initial certification process](#) for peer support specialists and is also [offering scholarships](#) to cover application, training, and examination fees associated with that process. To help guide potential applicants through the scholarship application process, LACDMH will hold a [virtual workshop](#) on Sept. 7 from 1:30 to 3 p.m. During the workshop, LACDMH staff and peers who have successfully completed their applications will share tips on the process and answer questions from attendees. For more information about this workshop, the peer certification process, and/or scholarship application, please email PeerCertProgram@dmh.lacounty.gov.

(Please note that the scholarship application is due on Friday, Sept. 16, and CalMHSA is currently only accepting applicants referred by County behavioral health agencies – including LACDMH – for the initial certification process.)

CONFIRMED PRESENTERS INCLUDE:

Robbi Lee Chazan, Joyce Choi, PhD, Ann Duckless, MA, Hadiyah Fokrazadi, PsyD, Blazimede Mello, LCSW, Dorene Sweetland, PhD, Sherry Wang, PhD, Stacie Annon Yeldell, MTEC, JYPT, Taya Karimovian, MD

2022 LASPN 12th Annual Suicide Prevention Summit
Healing Pathways for Support and Connection
September 14 – 16, 2022

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/2022LASPNconference>
 If you have questions about setting up a free EventsHub account, please email suicideprevention@dmh.lacounty.gov

DAY 1 - Sept 14 Community Track
Day 1 Keynote: Tess Barragan Banks, MSW/MHA

DAY 2 - Sept 15 Clinical Track
Day 2 Keynote: Tyrone Howard, PhD

DAY 3 - Sept 16 First Responders & Veterans Track
Day 3 Keynote: Raymond K. Hsu, PsyD

Logos: JOE SORENSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, The Hero in Each of Us, @LAC_SPN

Know the Signs and Reach Out for Suicide Prevention Month

September is **National Suicide Prevention Month**, and LACDMH will join numerous mental health organizations and campaigns – including

[Know The Signs](#), [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#), [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#), [988 Lifeline](#), [Didi Hirsch](#), and many others – to raise awareness and inspire action for suicide prevention.

The highlight of this monthlong effort is the [12th Annual Suicide Prevention Summit](#) hosted by the [Los Angeles County Suicide Prevention Network](#) from Sept. 14 to 16. This virtual conference will bring together a diverse group of mental health experts, suicide prevention advocates, and those with lived experiences to share latest findings, personal insights, and practical skills that are vital to saving lives, supporting suicide attempt survivors, and helping those who have lost a loved one to suicide. This year's summit theme is "**Healing Pathways for Support and Connection**," and the events will focus on developing communities and networks that foster healing and interaction to enhance collective resilience and well-being.

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 or texting '988' or through online chat on [988 Lifeline's website](#). (You can also learn more about the recently launched 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline on our [website](#).)

AUGUST

NATIONAL
BREASTFEEDING
AWARENESS
MONTH



August is National Breastfeeding Month

As part of a [nationwide effort](#) to encourage and support breastfeeding, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors has [unanimously proclaimed](#) August as “**National Breastfeeding Month**” and has asked all County departments to create or improve opportunities and resources that support breastfeeding. Among [numerous other benefits](#), breastfeeding can help improve mental health for both infants and parents in multiple ways, including the release of oxytocin, which helps relieve stress, during lactation and the opportunity to bond during the feeding process. To learn more about breastfeeding benefits and resources available to L.A. County parents, visit this [Department of Public Health site](#).



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 subject matter experts:

- [LAist](#) and [Fox News L.A.](#) covered the recent 988 launch and highlighted the ongoing partnership between Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, the regional 988 call center, and LACDMH to ensure callers receive appropriate mental health support over phone, text, or in-person through the deployment of LACDMH's mobile teams.

- [Inside Higher Ed](#) and [UC Newsroom](#) featured LACDMH's collaboration with UCLA for the [Depression Grand Challenge](#), which aims to cut the burden of depression in half by 2050 through better understanding, prevention, and treatment of the disorder.
- [Long Beach Business Journal](#) covered the groundbreaking of The Cove, an affordable housing development for veterans experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges. LACDMH is a partner in this project and will provide veteran-specific mental health support for its residents.



Cultural Traditions and Connections

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

“Food For Thought”

By Johnathan Maravillas, Community Member

Through food, we are exposed to the culinary artists' culture and way of life. Similarly, to cooking competitions like Master Chef and the Great British Bake Off, I joined a competition where the chefs had to use solemnly native Mesoamerican ingredients. This opportunity came during a time in my life when I was connecting with my native roots. As

a native of the Wixárica subtribe from Nayarit, Mexico, I want to invite you to find your element in Mesoamerican cuisine. Here are some vegetables whose origins you might not have realized: Squash, chiles, tomato, tomatillo, zapote, avocado, and papaya are native to the Mesoamerican region while peppercorn, cilantro, aloe vera, rosemary, lettuce, and garlic are foreign to the Americas.

Cooking the traditional cuisine of my ancestors is part of my self-care. My recovery journey started when I realized my family was not spared from generational trauma. My great, great grandparents were taught to hide and deny their Wixárica roots to prevent persecution and death. Thankfully, I have stopped the pattern and no longer pass down the shame my parents battled with for years.

[Continue reading here.](#)

Let's get social @LACDMH!



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. Visit dmh.lacounty.gov for more resources.

We welcome your comments, story ideas, and recommendations at pio@dmh.lacounty.gov.