



## Message from the Acting Director



Dear DMH family,

[988](#), the easy-to-remember phone number for people experiencing mental health-related distress, officially launched in July, offering 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors for anyone with thoughts of suicide, or a mental health or substance abuse crisis. [Assembly Bill 988](#), The Miles Hall Lifeline & Suicide Prevention Act, passed the California legislature with bipartisan support and was just recently signed by Governor Gavin Newsom. The adoption of AB 988 will transform the way behavioral health crisis assistance is provided to anyone who needs it, and the state will be well on its way to delivering the responsive continuum of care that our most vulnerable citizens deserve. In L.A. County, this translates to reinforcing 988 call center services while continuing to work hard to increase the number of psychiatric mobile response teams (PMRT) and

stabilization services to ensure that people get the kind of care they need, when they need it.

We've made important strides in increasing our field crisis response capacity with the addition of contracted Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCOT) to assist on weekends and evenings, as we continue to build our directly operated PMRT capacity. This will allow DMH response to be available around the clock. These additional field crisis response teams will be operational by the end of October in five of our eight service areas, and we are moving forward with securing services that will cover the entire L.A. County.

As Suicide Prevention Awareness Month comes to a close, we know that DMH efforts to raise awareness and work towards comprehensive suicide prevention must continue well beyond September. The L.A. Suicide Prevention Network ([LASPN](#)) works year-round to promote public and professional awareness, education, training, and engagement regarding suicide and suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention in L.A. County. One population that we are focusing on is U.S. Veterans. This week, DMH hosted the first meeting of the Veteran Suicide Review Team ([VSRT](#)), a multidisciplinary group of professionals and community members that meets to evaluate the circumstances leading to, and causing, suicides. Their goal is to improve community and service systems and to take the kinds of action that will successfully prevent suicides. VSRT is an important step on the path to end veteran suicide in Los Angeles County. Working with our Co-Chairs for this pilot program—Department of Public Health's Office of Violence and Prevention, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner—DMH will have the necessary facts and essential data to identify trends that will inform countywide strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

This Thursday, I was honored to spend time with some amazing people (both staff & clients) in Skid Row. It was a time of great reflection for me as I thought about *the past*, both my own experiences and what the Skid Row community has come through; *the present*, with all its challenges & seemingly insurmountable circumstances (over 20 near-death overdoses in one day shift, saved by emergency Narcan administration yesterday); and *the future*, with all its possibilities and promise. Being there reminded me why I am here, why we are here - the great need before us, and the great efforts that will be required to care for our fellow human beings and serve our communities.

Even outside of Skid Row, many of us (and those we care about) are dealing with a lot. If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach out for help and services at the [DMH Help Line](#) or call 988. I encourage you to take time for self-care and meaningful, enjoyable activities. Take

time to check in on the people around you. Let's build an interconnectedness that will allow us to weave a safety net of support and well-being, enabling us to not only survive these times, but thrive.

With All My Heart,



Dr. Lisa H. Wong  
Acting Director



### **Program Highlight: Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network**

Launched in 2010 to meet the growing need for suicide prevention and crisis intervention resources, the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network (LASPN) is a joint effort between LACDMH and its numerous partners who are collectively focused on decreasing the number of suicide deaths and attempts in L.A. County and beyond.

Together, LASPN works to engage communities, raise awareness of mental health issues and resources, coordinate professional and layperson trainings, and share evidence-based best practices for suicide prevention, intervention, and “postvention” (which supports those who

survived a suicide attempt and those who have lost a loved one to suicide).

According to Tracie Andrews, LACDMH's Mental Health Clinical Supervisor and Co-Chair of LASPN, the network's formation was an organic process.

“Our department was already providing training, support, and linkage services through the MHSA-funded [Partners in Suicide Prevention Program](#) (PSP), and we discovered a wealth of experts and resources in the community as well as a broad range of unmet demand, so we formed LASPN as a way to bring all of our partners to the table and work together to prevent suicides in the County.”

[Click to continue reading about LASPN.](#)



## **Waiting List for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Opening Soon**

Individuals and families who are interested in participating in Section 8 housing program will soon be able to put their names on the waiting list. The housing choice voucher program aids low-income families to be able to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing. The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) will open the waiting list lottery for Section 8 between Oct. 17 to Oct. 30 and interested individuals may apply online through [HACLA's website](#).



In accordance with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations, HACLA must maintain a waiting list for the Section 8 program, and the current list – which was last opened in 2017 – will be exhausted soon.

In preparation for the application's launch on Oct. 17, HACLA is working with partner agencies and organizations to increase awareness of the HACLA's application period and process, ensure equitable application access, and support individuals who face barriers with online applications. For more information, refer to HACLA's announcement [letter](#) and fact sheet ([English/Spanish](#)) about the waiting list lottery opening, and additional materials will be published on [HACLA's website](#) in early October.



## LACDMH and Partners Join Forces to Form Veteran Suicide Review Team

L.A. County's Veteran Suicide Review Team (VSRT) officially kicked off with its first meeting yesterday at LACDMH's headquarters, beginning a collaborative and data-informed process to analyze veteran suicides and look for opportunities to prevent additional suicides in the veteran community.

The partnership included staff and resources from multiple County departments, including co-lead departments LACDMH, [Medical](#)

[Examiner/Coroner](#), [Public Health](#), as well as additional representatives from [Military and Veterans Affairs](#), local, state, federal, and private agencies. Together, they will systematically examine veteran suicide, with a focus on identifying service gaps or unmet needs so that resources can be enhanced to better support veterans' well-being.

VSRT's creation was introduced as a [board motion](#) by L.A. County Supervisors Kathryn Barger and Sheila Kuehl, and it was unanimously approved by the Board of Supervisors. LACDMH is the lead administrative agency for VSRT during its one-year pilot phase.

La Tina Jackson, Deputy Director of LACDMH's Countywide Engagement Division, spoke about the need to address suicide in the veteran community. "The unfortunate reality is that veterans die by suicide at four times more than the national average," said Ms. Jackson. "They have a 57 percent higher risk for death by suicide than those who have not served. This is the disproportionate but preventable burden that each of us gathered here today has made a commitment to course correct. It is that commitment, that promise to our veterans and their families that we commence and commemorate today."

[Learn more about VSRT.](#)



National Hispanic-Latino Heritage Month, which takes place from September 15 to October 15, celebrates the cultures and achievements of Hispanic-Latino American communities in the United States. For our department, this month is also an opportunity to focus on this

population's specific well-being needs, especially in identifying and reducing their [unique barriers to accessing mental health care](#). Current and ongoing efforts to address this need include:

- Around-the-clock availability of Spanish-speaking staff at our [24/7 Help Line](#), as well as access to third-party services who can translate/interpret additional Latin American languages;
- Engagement with our stakeholders during program development, implementation, and evaluation, particularly through the [Latino Underserved Cultural Communities \(UsCC\) group](#);
- Our [United Mental Health Promoters program](#), which educates Hispanic-Latino communities about mental health issues, stigma reduction, and available supports through LACDMH and its partners;
- Engagement with Spanish language media and Hispanic-Latino community groups – including schools and faith-based organizations – through our [Speakers Bureau](#), where our experts share timely information and tips on mental health and well-being;

[Learn more about our efforts.](#)

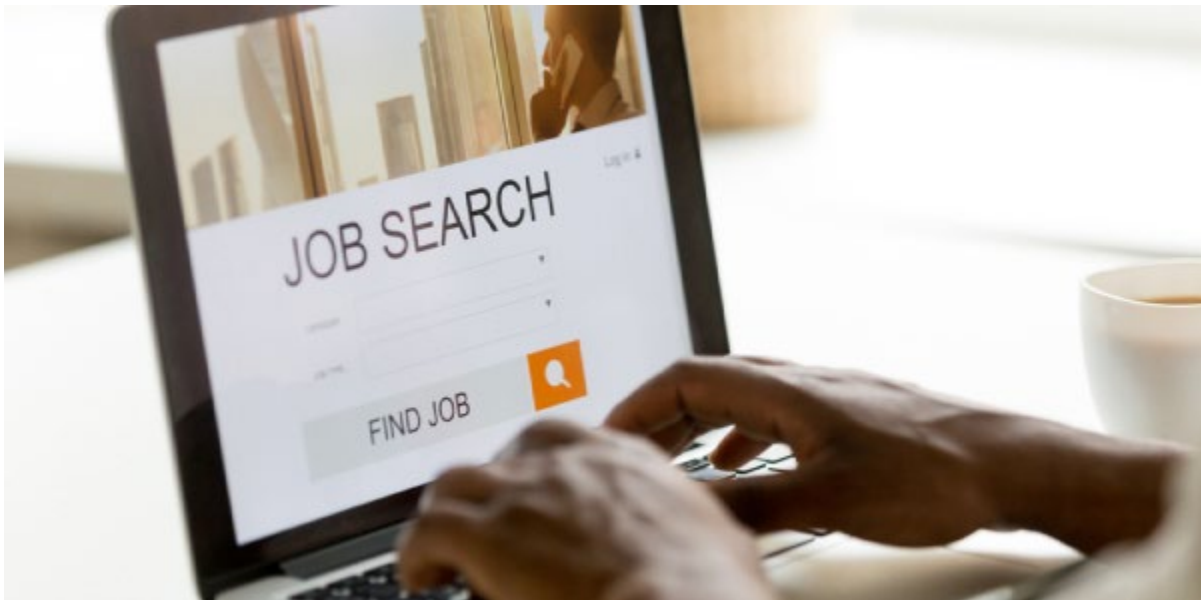


Our ongoing efforts to promote mental health awareness and assist the most vulnerable among us continue to receive positive attention in the media. In case you missed it, check out some highlights of the excellent stories and representation by our subject matter experts:

- [L.A. Times](#), [KCRW-FM](#), [KPCC-FM](#), and [KIIS-FM](#) highlighted the work of Dr. Shayan Rab as LACDMH's first street psychiatrist in our Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement program, which reaches out to individuals experiencing homelessness and mental

illness and connects them to housing, mental health, and other supportive resources.

- Dr. Lisa Wong was quoted in this [L.A. Times](#) story about the state of mental health in Los Angeles County and across the nation.
- [L.A. Times](#) also quoted LACDMH clinicians Dr. Derek Hsieh and Jung Ahn about how mental health is discussed in Asian American communities, with a focus on identifying and addressing cultural and linguistic barriers.
- [UCLA's Daily Bruin](#) featured LACDMH's partnership with UCLA to provide mental health screening, treatment, and monitoring services for community college students, who tend to experience higher stressors and have less access to well-being resources than students enrolled at four-year universities.



## Cultural Traditions and Connections

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

### **“National Recovery Month: Locked Up from Employment”**

By Johana Lozano, Co-Chair of LACDMH's Cultural Competency Committee

Finding work is an overwhelming task for anyone. However, it is a distressful journey for individuals who have a behavioral condition and a history of incarceration. Discrimination, stigma, and mental illness



caused from being in a correctional institution all contribute to low hiring rates. As a peer specialist at the Peer Resource Center, Laura Kerr uses her lived experience to help citizens of Los Angeles County find meaningful employment. Her group, entitled “Work Readiness”, is more than just a handout. This support group provides career pathways, guidance, and training to improve upon basic job serving skills, understand employer expectations, and learn life skills needed for self-sufficiency.

"There is such a thing as work etiquette that we often don't know about," said Kerr.

[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](http://dmh.lacounty.gov) for more resources.

We welcome your comments, story ideas, and recommendations at [pio@dmh.lacounty.gov](mailto:pio@dmh.lacounty.gov).