

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

October 2024



LACDMH Celebrates Grand Opening, Groundbreaking across County

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health celebrated three new beginnings recently with the groundbreaking for Wesley Health Centers in Skid Row on Sept. 19, the grand opening of the Las Palmas apartments in Wilmington on Sept. 27, and a groundbreaking for the North Hollywood Health Center on Oct. 7.

Wesley Health Centers broke ground on its new adult residential substance use disorder (SUD) treatment facility and wellness center for people experiencing homelessness and/or mental health issues. The SUD treatment facility will house 38 beds while the community wellness center will serve 3,258 individuals.

LACDMH Director Dr. Lisa H. Wong spoke alongside the Office of First District Supervisor Hilda L. Solis; Libby Boyce, Deputy Director of the L.A. Department of Health Services, Housing for Health; and more. The project was jointly created by Wesley Health Centers and the California Department of Health Care Services.

[Continue reading about these events.](#)



LACDMH Staff Featured in “Welcome to the COVID Hotel” Exhibit

Last month, LACDMH staff were invited by the nonprofit Los Angeles Poverty Department to visit its “Welcome to the COVID Hotel” exhibition in Downtown Los Angeles. Through artwork, recorded interviews and discussions, “Welcome to the COVID Hotel” highlights the unique challenges and opportunities to provide healthcare services to the homeless community during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly to persons experiencing homelessness in quarantine & isolation sites throughout the County.

Multiple LACDMH staff were interviewed as part of this project, and they shared their experiences on how they adapted to the evolving situation and collaborated with other agencies and care providers to ensure clients’ safety and wellbeing. They and others also shared lessons learned and new opportunities that arose from this time – such as the recently formed Interim Housing Outreach Project in partnership with the Departments of Health Services and Public Health to better serve clients and support providers at shelters, motels, tiny homes, and other interim settings.

“Welcome to the COVID Hotel” will be on display at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive through December 14, 2024. For more information about the exhibition, visit the [Los Angeles Poverty Department’s website](#).



Los Angeles County Suicide Prevention Network Hosts 14th Annual Summit

The Los Angeles County Suicide Prevention (LASPN) hosted its 14th annual summit on Sep. 10 and 11 during Suicide Prevention Month at the California Endowment. This year's theme was Shining Our Light Together: Destigmatizing and Preventing Suicide. The event brought together mental health professionals, advocates, survivors, providers, researchers, and representatives from various agencies and organizations to work together to decrease the number of suicides in Los Angeles County.

The first day's highlight was the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, which performed songs of survival and joy. Several choir members also spoke about their own experiences and how they overcame their mental health struggles. There were also featured remarks by LACDMH Director Dr. Lisa H. Wong; Kristin Sakoda, Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture Director; Dr. Priya Batra, Deputy Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and more.

[Continue reading about LASPN Summit.](#)



**Veteran & Military
Family Services**

Veteran Peer Access Network Becomes Veteran & Military Family Services: New Name, Same Mission

On Oct. 1, the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) contract will officially move from the Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA). Veteran & Military Family Services (VMFS) will provide direct mental health services to vets and military families while continuing to connect them with services.

The contract, administered by Southern California Grantmakers, provides oversight to Community Based Organizations (CBO) operating VPAN offices in the field. Those CBOs are currently JVS (Supervisorial Districts 1 & 5), Veterans West (SD 2 & 4), and Goodwill SoCal (SD 3).

DMH staff currently operating as part of VPAN will be reorganized under the new VMFS which will be based on Los Angeles County Service Planning Areas (SPA) versus the SD model upon which VPAN operates.

“DMH and MVA are working closely together to ensure a successful transition as smoothly as possible,” said Dr. Rhonda Higgins, current VPAN Program Director, who will serve in the same capacity for VMFS.

[Learn more about VMFS.](#)



A Message from ARISE Staff Council

You settle into your hotel room, turn on the TV, and see the hotel's homepage display a land acknowledgment. As you explore the city, you notice land acknowledgments at museums and local businesses, and contemporary Indigenous art and exhibits are everywhere. It happens to be National Reconciliation Week. At your next destination, just a short plane ride away, Indigenous art and language are prominently featured in public signage and on TV. You feel awe, peace, and hope — this is not a dream. This is present-day Sydney, Australia, and New Zealand. These societies are deeply engaged in land acknowledgment and much more. Suddenly, L.A. County's recent adoption of a land acknowledgment feels like a tangible first step on the path to healing and reconciliation, and DMH is well-positioned to lead the way.

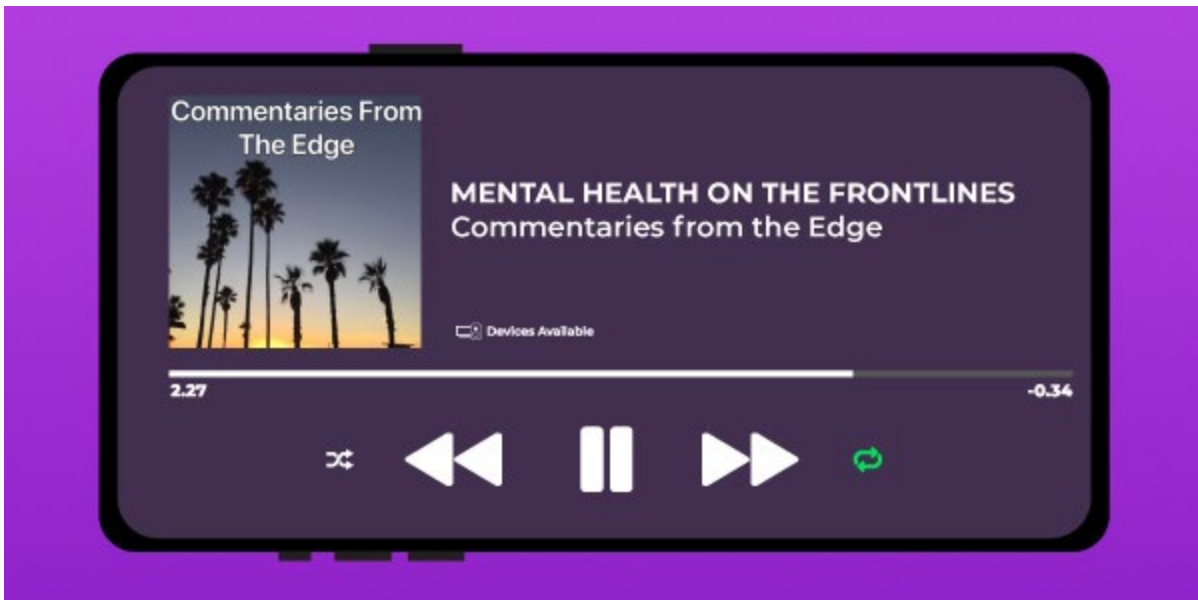
On November 1, 2022, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a Land Acknowledgment for the County. You may have heard it at County events, or most recently from Director Dr. Lisa H. Wong at our last DMH Town Hall meeting. You may be wondering: Why should I care?

[Continue reading about the statement from ARISE.](#)



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:

- Dr. Wong was quoted in a [Spectrum News](#) story about the groundbreaking of a CORE Center in North Hollywood, a 50,000 square foot facility that will provide services for people experiencing substance use and co-occurring disorders.
- [Los Angeles Times](#) featured the grand opening of Las Palmas Apartments, a LACDMH-supported development that will provide 53 units of supportive housing in Los Angeles' Wilmington neighborhood.
- The Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network's 2024 Summit was covered by [LAist](#) and **Univision**.
- The [Southern California News Group](#) (which includes **LA Daily News**, **Pasadena Star-News**, **Press-Telegram**, and other local news outlets) and [LAist](#) ran stories about Metropolitan State Hospital's vacant buildings being repurposed to become a "mental health village" that will provide treatment beds and housing to people experiencing mental illness and homelessness.
- [LAist](#) highlighted the RAND Report about the success of L.A. County's Rapid Diversion Program, which reduces recidivism by connected justice-involved individuals with behavioral health and other supportive resources. According to the reported, 91% of the program's participants did not face a new criminal case after their graduation.
- [Pasadena Now](#) mentioned LACDMH's collaboration with local agencies and organizations for suicide prevention efforts, including trainings for first responders, outreach to the community, and raising awareness of mental health resources.



Podcast Features Peers and Peer Resource Centers

LACDMH has launched a new podcast, Mental Health on the Frontlines, which highlights innovative and effective approaches to mental health support. The first two episodes, available on Apple Podcasts, focus on Peer Resource Centers (PRCs) - welcoming spaces where individuals seeking help are greeted by others who have faced similar emotional challenges.

Episode one features LACDMH peers Catherine Clay and Joseph Cuevas, while episode two spotlights PRC administrators Tosha Sweet and Tammy Lofton. Both episodes explore successful mental health programs and the importance of these efforts in our communities. This special series is part of the *Commentaries from the Edge* podcast, hosted by Keren Goldberg.

[Click here to listen on Apple Podcasts.](#)

 **Who Do I Call for Help?**

<p>9-1-1 to report crimes, fires, and medical emergencies when law enforcement, firefighters, or paramedics are needed</p> 	<p>800-854-7771 for crisis response teams in the field or mental health and substance use resources through the 24/7 LACDMH Help Line</p> 
<p>9-8-8 for support with suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress</p> 	<p>2-1-1 for general information on local resources or linkages and referrals to health, human, and social services</p> 

[Click on image above for *Who to Call Resources*](#)

Let's get social @LACDMH!



Thank you for taking the time to read and engage with this issue of **“Connecting Our Community,”** a bi-monthly online publication focused on the latest information and news from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. Visit dmh.lacounty.gov for more resources.

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