

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH  
Strategic Communications Division**

**Eastern-European / Middle Eastern (EE/ME) UsCC Subcommittee Meeting Minutes  
6/26/2024**

2:00PM – 4:00PM via Teleconference

1. **Present:** Rhoda Addam, Alam Ingrahim, Nane Avagyan, Mitra Shabani, Peyman Malaz, Sarah Yoseph, Ahmad Bottee, Hanadi Ashi, Jennifer Yates, Jamie Walker, Dr. Armine Stepanyan, Dr. Heather Laird, Rubou Sous, Seta Haig, Mastaneh Moghadam, Sarkis Simonian, Dr. Haydeh Fakhrabadi, Rima Safaryan, Avo Soltanian, Yue Hua Xu, Captioner (Cindy).

**DMH Admin:** Dr. Anna Yaralyan, Dr. Jennifer Alquijay.

Agenda Items	Comments/Discussion/Recommendations/Conclusions
<b>Introductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyone introduced themselves.</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting Minutes Review and Approval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed &amp; approved <b>5/29/24</b> EE/ME Subcommittee meeting minutes. Minutes were accepted by subcommittee members. There were no subcommittee member objections.</li> </ul>
<b>EE/ME Subcommittee Capacity Building Proposals FY 2024-2025</b>	<p><b>Capacity Building Project Proposals, CBPs, for FY 2024-2025 were presented. Voting Members may vote for up to 2 projects for Armenian, Farsi, Arabic and Russian speaking communities each. The CBPs are the following:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For the Armenian Community CBPs are Titled:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The Wellness Festival for Kids and Teens:</b></li> </ul> <p>The Wellness Festival for Kids and Teens is a comprehensive event designed to address the growing mental health challenges Armenian kids and young people face.</p> <p>The festival combines interactive and educational activities for children and teens with valuable resources for parents, promoting healthy lifestyles and creating an inclusive environment for learning and growth. The event</p> </li> </ol>

aims to educate the community about wellness topics, reduce mental health stigma, and provide culturally relevant resources while engaging local health professionals.

- **Bonding and Expressing Emotions Through Art:**

Project description:

Over a period of 12 months, this project will engage immigrant Armenians of all age groups to participate in 90-minute art expression sessions. These sessions will be repeated 20 times.

Purpose of the project:

Armenians possess a rich cultural heritage, and their artistic expression is diverse. Through art, Armenians have conveyed their cultural identity, including Christianization paintings and depictions of national heroism and resilience. Art education is deeply esteemed in Armenia, where there is a special affection for painting and art. It's possible that the majestic mountains of Armenia have influenced this profound love for art.

Currently, many Armenian immigrants face challenges with depression, anxiety, and the stigma associated with seeking help or discussing their emotions. Art expression sessions provide a supportive environment where participants can convey their feelings through their artwork and engage in discussions about mental health. These sessions aim to facilitate open conversations about mental health issues and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. By doing so, these painting sessions address mental health stigma within the community and promote awareness, empathy, and dialogue.

- **LGBTQ Conversation in the Armenian Community:**

The project will consist of social media (i.e. Facebook) programs/episodes consisting of interviews in a pre-recorded studio setting (not Zoom) with LGBTQ personalities and professionals regarding the challenges and misconceptions facing the LGBTQ community, and how to educate the Armenian community about these challenges and help them understand the complexities of the issues and helping them overcome the stigma and biases against the LGBTQ community. Episodes will be weekly and cover myriad issues and published on a pre-dedicated Facebook page which makes it accessible to all in the privacy of their home.

**2. For the Russian & Farsi Community CBP is Titled:**

- **Wellness Circles: for the Russian/Ukrainian and Farsi Speaking Communities:**

The proposed project aims to establish twelve, in-person, wellness circles; six for the Russian & Ukrainian speaking and another six for the Farsi speaking communities of LA County. These groups will focus on introducing and utilizing a variety of alternative healing techniques, such as movement, sound baths, drumming, storytelling, art therapy, mindfulness, etc. to help participants become familiar with a variety of techniques that they can use in their journey towards mental health & wellbeing.

Each circle will have capacity for a maximum of 25 participants per session and will be 3-hours in length. Circles will be geared towards participants who are adolescents, adults, and older adults, giving the opportunity for generational healing. The effectiveness of the project will be measured through client feedback and pre & post surveys.

**3. For the Russian, Arabic & Farsi Community CBP is Titled:**

- **Social Media Outreach Project for the Russian/Ukrainian, Arabic and Farsi Speaking Communities.**

The proposed project aims to create a series of 30 second videos and posts that are all related to the exploration of mental health topics (including mental health diagnosis often found amongst immigrant communities, symptomology, mental health skills, techniques and theories that help support individuals and families, and alternative coping strategies). These videos and posts will be geared toward adolescent young adults and adults who are part of the Russian/Ukrainian, Arabic and Farsi speaking communities of LA County. The video's will all be posted on various social media sites including Tick Tock, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, routinely for a period of 6 months.

The project ultimately aims to promote individual empowerment and community resilience by providing tools and strategies for coping with the unique stressors and challenges faced by the Russian/Ukrainian, Arabic and Farsi speaking communities, while reducing the stigma associated with mental health and the seeking of mental health services by offering a culturally relevant and stigma-free space for mental health support and education. Since the majority of TAY and adults spend a great deal of their time on social media, this program will be meeting people where they are. Additionally, the project will be sustainable. The social media posts will continue to live on the various sites well beyond the months of the grant and will thus be useful to

people for years and years to come.

**4. For the Farsi Speaking Community CBP is Titled:**

- **Psycho educational group and skills building for Farsi and Dari speakers of adults and older adults:**

**Target Population:**

This projects target population comprises Iranian and Afghan across a wide age range from 25 and above who speak Farsi and Dari. These individuals are residents of Service Area 2, including Sherman Oaks, Encino, and Van Nuys, areas known for significant Farsi-speaking communities.

**Data Supporting Project Goals:**

Los Angeles is home to the largest Farsi-speaking (Persian) community in the United States. In 2022, California became the state with the most Afghan refugees, most of whom speak Dari, a Farsi dialect. The Farsi (Persian) and Dari-speaking communities with limited English proficiency form the fifth largest language group in Los Angeles. The number of Afghan refugees is increasing rapidly; among the clients served by Pars Equality Center in this community, 73% are low- and moderate-income, and the unemployment rate is more than 45% higher than the statewide average. The need for this project is supported by data indicating that immigrant communities, including Farsi and Dari speakers, often encounter barriers to accessing mental health services due to language barriers, cultural stigma, and a lack of culturally competent care.

**Potential Impact on the UsCC Community:**

This project is expected to have a significant positive impact on the UsCC community. It is designed to improve mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and enhance physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being through mindfulness, music therapy, and functional movement exercises. Conducted in Farsi and Dari, this culturally sensitive initiative also aims to boost English proficiency, foster community connections, and address service delivery gaps to ensure effective mental health support. By tackling critical needs and removing barriers to mental health services, the program provides significant benefits to Farsi and Dari-speaking adults in the target areas, promoting early intervention, improved access to mental health resources, and overall holistic well-being.

- **Skills building through art therapy and mindfulness for Farsi and Dari speakers of children and TAY populations:**

**Target Population:**

Our target population comprises Farsi and Dari-speaking from children 10 to 15 years old to Transition Age Youth (TAY), specifically Iranian and Afghan individuals who are residents of Area 2, including Sherman Oaks, Encino, and Van Nuys, areas known for significant Farsi-speaking communities.

**Data Supporting Project Goals:**

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The need for this project is supported by data indicating that immigrant communities, including Farsi and Dari speakers, often encounter barriers to accessing mental health services due to language barriers, cultural stigma, and a lack of culturally competent care.

**Potential Impact on the UsCC Community:**

The specific program for children and TAY aims to boost mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and enhance physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being through art therapy, dance, and mindfulness practices. Delivered in Farsi and Dari, this culturally sensitive program also strengthens English literacy, builds community connections, and identifies gaps in service delivery to ensure the provision of relevant and effective mental health support. By addressing critical needs and eliminating barriers to accessing mental health services, the program significantly benefits Farsi and Dari-speaking youth in the target areas, promoting early intervention, better access to mental health resources, and overall well-being.

**5. For the Arabic Speaking Community CBP is Titled:**

- **LACDMH Outreach Through Installation of Smart TVs:**

The project entails identifying the community centers of Eastern European and/or Middle Eastern people throughout Los Angeles County and installing Smart Television units (TV units) equipped with ad reels regarding Mental Health Services provided by LACDMH within these community centers. Once the TV units are installed, ads can be managed/updated onsite by our staff throughout the fiscal year to align with LACDMH goals and

criteria. Our staff will also assist in converting LACDMH messages into the predominant languages spoken by community members, as well as providing telephone support via translation to help connect community members in contacting LACDMH for services.

Identifying these community centers will be done through our outreach staff, through direct contact with community leaders, facility managers, and attending appropriate community activities. By installing these Smart Television units, awareness and guidance to Mental Health Services will be on display throughout the day for all community members to see. This will create more enrollment into Mental Health Treatment, to allow more individuals a path to recovery. The objective is to install (60) TV units within the fiscal year.

- **Monthly gathering for Mental Health awareness:**

This project will help to reduce mental health problems among the Muslims and the Arabs by inviting professional speakers to inform the community about mental disorders and how important it is to seek professional health and build resilience to overcome mental health problem. The project will include inviting the community in-person over food at rented facility, to attend and listen to the speakers. Also, the members can ask their questions and concerns and get answers and information from the professionals; overall there will be a discussion about mental health. The members of the community will have an opportunity to access the county mental health services through this monthly event.

- **Mom Relaxing Day for Mothers of Special Needs Children:**

The purpose of this project is to support and appreciate mothers who care for children with special needs, providing them with a day of relaxation and support from Sudanese doctors and specialists. Caring for children with special needs can be incredibly demanding and often leads to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion for mothers. These mothers devote their lives to ensuring their children receive the care and attention they need, often neglecting their own well-being in the process. Recognizing their relentless dedication, Karima Sudan aims to provide these mothers with a day dedicated to relaxation, self-care, and support. These events will take place in a safe space such as a house or building where a comfortable environment is created. This event will not only give them a much-needed break, but also connect them with resources and a community of peers who understand their challenges.

The project can help mothers unwind and rejuvenate; the event will include a variety of relaxation activities:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional massage therapists will provide soothing massages to relieve physical tension and stress.</li> <li>• Gentle yoga classes led by experienced instructors will help participants relax, stretch, and improve their physical well-being.</li> <li>• Guided meditation sessions will promote mental relaxation and mindfulness, helping mothers manage stress and anxiety.</li> <li>• In addition to relaxation activities, the event will offer educational and supportive sessions: Sudanese doctors and specialists will lead discussions on topics relevant to caring for children with special needs, such as managing medical appointments, navigating healthcare systems, and understanding developmental therapies.</li> <li>• Facilitated support groups will provide a safe space for mothers to share their experiences, challenges, and successes with others who understand their journey. These groups will foster a sense of community and mutual support.</li> <li>• To ensure that mothers can fully participate in the day’s activities without worry, professional childcare services will be provided. Trained caregivers will look after the children, engaging them in fun and educational activities while their mothers enjoy the day’s events.</li> </ul>
<b>EE/ME Subcommittee Capacity Building Updates FY 2023 - 2024</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Support Group and Mental Health Educational Seminar for Afghan Refugees</b></li> <li><b>2. Arabic Coffee &amp; Tea Conversation Project</b></li> <li><b>3. Armenian Festival Project</b></li> <li><b>4. Armenian Poetry Circles for Mental Health</b></li> <li><b>5. Russian and Farsi Mental Health Film Project #2</b></li> </ol> <p>Anna Yaralyan reported that all five SOWs are currently completed &amp; pending for supervisor review and approval.</p>
<b>Next Meeting</b>	<p>❖ <b>Next meeting will be on Wednesday 9/25/24, from 2:00pm – 4:00pm.</b></p>
	<p><b><u>Join Microsoft Teams Meeting</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (323) 446-6996 United States, Los Angeles (Toll)</li> </ul> <p>Conference ID: 985 297 792#</p>