



## **CITY, COUNTY, AND STATE NEWS**

**NEW YORK, NY: *Announces New Mental Health Teams to Respond to Mental Health Crises:*** For the first time in the city's history, Mayor de Blasio announced that new Mental Health Teams of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) health professionals and mental health crisis workers will be dispatched through 911 to respond to mental health emergencies in two high-need communities. Currently, NYPD officers and FDNY Emergency Medical Services Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) respond to nearly all mental health 911 calls, regardless of the severity of health needs, whether a crime is involved, or whether there is an imminent risk of violence. In the health-centered pilot announced today, new Mental Health Teams of health professionals and crisis workers from FDNY Emergency Medical Services will be the default response to mental health emergencies in two high-need precincts. Beginning in February 2021, new Mental Health Teams will use their physical and mental health expertise, and experience in crisis response to de-escalate emergency situations, will help reduce the number of times police will need to respond to 911 mental health calls in these precincts. These teams will have the expertise to respond to a range of behavioral health problems, such as suicide attempts, substance misuse, and serious mental illness, as well as physical health problems, which can be exacerbated by or mask mental health problems. NYC Health + Hospitals will train and provide ongoing technical assistance and support. In selecting team members for this program, FDNY will prioritize professionals with significant experience with mental health crises. In emergency situations involving a weapon or imminent risk of harm, the new Mental Health Teams will respond along with NYPD officers. Over 65% of all operational staff in NYPD patrol precincts across the City have now been trained in Crisis Intervention Team training, a state-of-the-art approach that continues to improve the way officers recognize and respond to behavioral health problems experienced by people they encounter. In all precincts other than the two precincts selected for this pilot, NYPD officers and FDNY Emergency Medical Services EMTs will continue to provide coordinated responses to mental health emergencies. The pilot announced today is modeled on successful, alternative to police response programs in other cities. The CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on The Streets) program in Eugene, Oregon is embedded into the 911 system and includes teams of paramedics and crisis workers who have significant experience in the mental health field. Designed as an alternative to police response for non-violent situations, CAHOOTS teams responded to approximately 24,000 calls last year and addressed a wide range of mental health-related crises. In approximately 150 cases, CAHOOTS teams requested police backup. Similar approaches are also being pursued in cities such as Albuquerque, Denver, Los Angeles and San Francisco, among others.

**HOUSTON, TX: *Houston hosting free mental health virtual town hall meeting on surviving pandemic during the holidays:*** The city of Houston is focusing on mental health as we all deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Sylvester Turner's Health Equity Response task force hosted a virtual town meeting to focus on surviving the pandemic during the holidays. Constituents received free advice on coping with the demands of parenting, finances, and physical and emotional stress during the holiday season. Mental health providers in the Houston area have said they are seeing an increase in anxiety, depression and substance use. Some experts point toward social media and the 24-hour news cycle as having a negative effect on mental well-being.

**MADISON, WI: *Mayor looks to add alternative mental health crisis response program to 2021 budget:***

Madison leaders are looking into an alternate police response that could cut down the types of calls police respond to. At Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway's last weekly press briefing, she announced that she sent a letter to congress to support a federal CAHOOTS Act. "The CAHOOTS Act is named after the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, OR, which mobilizes two person teams consisting of a paramedic or an EMT and a crisis worker," Rhodes-Conway said. "They have substantial training and experience in trauma-informed de-escalation and harm-reduction techniques, and they respond to a range of behavioral health crises." Rhodes-Conway says this would result in better outcomes for callers and would lift these types of calls from police and would save taxpayers money along the way. Madison Interim Police Chief Vic Wahl responded to this idea saying: "We are generally supportive of exploring this concept and think it is a good idea to do the pilot program next year. However, it is not at all clear how this might impact MPD's workload just yet. The municipalities that have similar teams/programs all have worked very closely with police, and there are a number of statutory provisions that require police involvement with certain mental health crises." MPD currently partners with Journey Mental Health. There's a role for all of the models to best serve the needs and to really sort out in this instance we don't want police, we really just want a peer or a mental health specialist on their own." Rhodes-Conway said she has planned for some type of CAHOOTS program in her 2021 budget which will be discussed at tonight's city council meeting. She said Congressman Marc Pocan has signed on as a sponsor and she's hoping state senators will sign on as sponsors too.

**MIAMI DADE, FL: *Miami-Dade Launches Mental Health Wellness Program for County Residents:*** The main goal of the COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellness Program is to address the mental health issues that people are dealing with at this time of the pandemic. A new program launched this week to help residents in Miami-Dade County achieve just that and it's also free. Miami-Dade County COVID Relief Aid helped fund the program and they've partnered with New Horizons Mental Health Clinic and Barry University. With federal money from the CARES Act distributed through Miami-Dade County government, RER worked with community collaborators to launch the COVID-19 Mental Health & Wellness Program. To enroll, Miami-Dade residents must complete an online survey at [MyMentalHealthMiami.com/Survey](https://www.mymentalhealthmiami.com/survey). Respondents then receive a scorecard measuring their anxiety, stress and depression levels. Those with high indicators of mental health issues will be referred to New Horizons' care number (786.433.8502) for a free consultation.

**PHILADELPHIA, PA: *Philadelphia adds behavioral health specialists to 911 dispatches in police reform effort:***

Philadelphia will assign behavioral health specialists to work alongside police radio dispatchers for the first time in the city's history. The 911 Triage and Co-Responder Program will create a triage desk to identify 911 calls involving mental health issues and offer services to those residents instead of arresting them. The goal of the program is to move individuals with behavioral health needs away from the criminal justice system and into appropriate care. The program is a response to widespread calls for police reform in Philadelphia. In a pilot program embedding outreach workers with officers in the Philadelphia's East police division, officials connected over 150 people to appropriate mental health services without making any arrests. Philadelphia is also planning to expand its co-responder program, which partners behavioral health workers and law enforcement to respond to calls involving behavioral health issues.

**TALLAHASSEE, FL: *Tallahassee Creates Mental Health Crisis Response Team:***

The coronavirus has exasperated pre-existing mental health problems and now the City of Tallahassee, local law enforcement and the areas primary mental health hospital are trying to address it. Traditionally, law enforcement has responded to mental health calls. Under the city's pilot project—a new team made up of a licensed mental health professional, a TPD officer and paramedic would respond to non-violent calls for mental-health related help. The city gets about 2300 such calls a year, the city's Abena Ojetayo told commissioners. That's more than six calls a day. Commissioners gave approval to the city manager to partner with the Apalachee Center to go ahead with the program. "Knowing that we have brothers and sisters, moms and dads, friends and citizens

dealing with mental health issues, sometimes a response by the police department isn't what's always needed. What's needed is a higher level of service," Tallahassee Mayor John Dailey said in a video message on twitter. Dailey spearheaded the effort to create the pilot program and abstained from the vote. It was passed unanimously. "I know this is going to make a difference in all our lives here in Tallahassee, and it's one more step in providing world-class services," he said. The city commission previously approved \$500,000 for the mental health crisis response team. It's slated to launch next Spring.

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CA: *County launches mental health program for first responders:*** San Diego County Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, behavioral health experts, first responders and the father of the late Cal Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell gathered Tuesday at the County Administration Center to announce a new behavioral health support program for first responders. The program is now available to provide confidential mental health and substance abuse services to firefighters, emergency medical services technicians, members of law enforcement agencies, 911 dispatchers, lifeguards and probation officers in San Diego County. Supervisor Fletcher initially introduced the policy to create and fund the program in September 2019 and it was passed by the Board of Supervisors. Since then the county has been developing the program and conducting outreach to first responders in partnership with its program administrator, Pathways. The services are provided at no-cost and are confidential. People needing assistance can call 1-833-YU-FIRST (1-833-983-4778), or visit [SDFirstRespondersProgram.org](http://SDFirstRespondersProgram.org). The Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program provides a 24-hour referral helpline staffed by active and retired first responders, resources to connect first responders to local behavioral health resources, mental health and substance use treatment and in-service training to first responders to increase awareness about mental health resources and decrease the stigma and barriers associated with seeking treatment.

## **EXECUTIVE**

### **CDC Report Shows Children's Visits to Emergency Rooms for Mental Health Concerns Increase**

- A [new CDC report](#) finds that children's visits to emergency departments for mental health concerns have been higher than usual this year, possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Between January and early March 2020, ED visits among kids for mental health concerns went up compared to that same period in 2019, but dipped down to lower-than-usual levels once the nationwide lockdown was instituted in mid-March
- At the same time, the proportion of kids' visits to EDs for mental health concerns steadily increased and remained high all the way through October
- The proportion of such visits was up 24% among those ages 5-11 and 31% among adolescents aged 12-17, compared to the same period last year

### **President-elect Joe Biden Announces Covid-19 Task Force**

- President-elect Joe Biden just announced a coronavirus task force made up of scientific experts and advisers
- The 13-person task force includes people, such as former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, former FDA Commissioner David Kessler, and Yale physician-researcher Marcella Nunez-Smith, who will all serve as co-chairs. Other members include former BARDA director Rick Bright as well as surgeon and prolific author Atul Gawande

- Biden has promised that the plan from the task force will be "built on bedrock science," but his allies have indicated that Biden will likely exercise caution in using the bully pulpit of the White House before his inauguration

## **CONGRESS**

### **Senate Appropriations Introduce FY21 Spending Bills**

- The Fiscal Year 2021 funding measure for Labor-Health and Human Services released by the Senate Appropriations Committee
- The bill provides almost \$6 billion overall for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), \$1.7 billion for mental health services overall, and \$13 million in increased funding for suicide prevention programs
- The bill would fund both the Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) and the Substance Use Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant at Fiscal Year 2020 levels

### **House Democrats Introduce *Mental Health Justice Act***

- Reps. Katie Porter, Tony Cárdenas, Mary Gay Scanlon, and Ayanna Pressley have introduced the Mental Health Justice Act, and the one-pager can be found [here](#).
- The Mental Health Justice Act would address this by creating a grant program to pay for hiring, training, salary, benefits and additional expenses for mental health provider first responder units.
- These mental health providers would act as a mental health emergency response team, deployed when 911 is called because someone is in a mental health crisis or related situation.
- Grant recipients would also receive expert advice through technical assistance from the Disability Rights Section of the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice (DOJ) and from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

## **IN OTHER NEWS**

### **New Study Shows 20% of Covid-19 Patients Developed Mental Illness within 90 Days**

- New research suggests that people who have survived COVID-19 infections are at a greater risk of developing mental illness
- This data, published in The Lancet Psychiatry Journal, indicates that 20 percent of observed COVID-19 patients are diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder such as anxiety, depression, or insomnia within 90 days after being diagnosed
- Researchers analyzed data from about 69 million people, 62,354 of whom were COVID-19 patients, to see if they were at an increased risk of psychiatric diagnoses following the infection as opposed to people with other health complications

- The results suggest that COVID-19 patients saw greater post-illness diagnoses of anxiety disorder, insomnia and even dementia, as opposed to patients who were sick with influenza or another respiratory tract infection like COVID-19
- Anxiety disorders were the most common diagnoses following an infection, with dementia only occurring in patients older than age 65
- More severe psychotic disorders, which have potential to severely compromise everyday cognition, were less commonly seen

## **WEEKEND READING**

**NEW YORK TIMES:** Teens in Covid Isolation: 'I Felt Like I Was Suffocating'

**HEALIO:** COVID-19 pandemic has caused 'dramatic changes' in approach to mental health care

**JOHN'S HOPKINS UNIVERSITY HUB:** COVID-19'S Lasting Toll on Mental Health

**PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH LEARNING NETWORK:** Transition to Virtual Mental Health Care Occurred Rapidly in Pandemic's Early Weeks

**\*\*The information in this email was compiled from the following news sources including: Axios, Politico, The Hill, Modern Healthcare, Vox, STAT, and CQ Roll Call\*\***