



PRESS RELEASE

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“May Is Mental Health Month” Goes Virtual *Services & Supports Needed Now More Than Ever*

East Providence – As May kicks off “May is Mental Health Month”, COVID-19 has changed how the five behavioral health organizations that make up Horizon Healthcare Partners (HHP) honor the month amidst a public health crisis/pandemic that has rendered their services to be needed now more than ever.

Community Care Alliance (CCA), Newport Mental Health, Thrive Behavioral Health, Tides Family Services and CODAC are the five behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorders) organizations that comprise HHP. In a normal year, these agencies and other mental health providers across the state, would be celebrating at the State House and hosting hundreds of local events to remind Rhode Islanders about the importance of mental health well-being and recovery. COVID-19 changed all that, and propelled behavioral health organizations to the frontlines as Rhode Islanders, and all Americans, struggle with the emotional toll of the pandemic.

“When the COVID-19 crisis hit our state it immediately became clear the behavioral health effects of this pandemic,” stated Frank Shea, Interim CEO of HHP. “We realized very quickly how important it was to pivot from hosting face-to-face events to celebrate “May as Mental Health Month” to providing, virtually, those critical resources and support needed for Rhode Islanders struggling with their behavioral health wellness due to COVID-19.”

HHP has joined with the Mental Health Association of RI (MHARI) and other behavioral health organizations across the state to develop a virtual strategy to provide daily resources and support available for all Rhode Islanders including social media postings and online activities and events. A full list of online activities can be found on www.mhari.org. Social postings will also be posted through the BH Link Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts.

“At this moment in time, the 2020 May is Mental Health Month is vitally important. The long lasting sequelae of this pandemic on people’s mental health is yet to be realized and will rival the emotional impact of 911 and other large-scale disasters. We know that the financial and personal strain of unemployment, the isolation, and the stress and anxiety we all are facing has already dramatically increased the demand for our services,” said CEO and President Jamie Lehane of Newport Mental Health. “People

are concerned and frustrated, some are traumatized and sadly, some are grieving the losses of their loved ones.”

Lehane also noted the generosity of local residents with donations for the housing over 20 of Newport’s homeless adults and children, many of who live with mental health and substance use disorders. “These donations help keep them off the streets and in warm beds at night during the pandemic.”

Lehane added that while we can’t celebrate the recoveries of clients in person during May, we’ll be able to hear their personal stories every Friday in May in Newport Mental Health’s “Podcast Fridays,” which is available at their website: www.newportmentalhealth.org

“We are mindful of the risks of isolation and its negative health consequences for many of the people we serve, and have a great concern for people in distress. The result is an added determination by staff and the community to reach out, extend help and continue human contact in creative ways. Seeing the positive in all of this is an important aspect of promoting mental health.” said Benedict Lessing, President/CEO at Community Care Alliance.

“May being Mental Health Month takes on even greater importance during the current crisis,” added Dan Kubas-Meyer, President/CEO of Thrive Behavioral Health. “The staff of Thrive Behavioral Health urges all the members of the community to take care of their mental as well as their physical well being. Keep an eye of for signs of stress and seek help if you feel overwhelmed. Treatment works and the provider community is here for you.”

Thrive has numerous activities planned for the month including:

- “How to Talk with Kids About Coronavirus” developed by Thrive Youth and Family Services Department;
- Tips from Hillsgrove Clubhouse Peer Members on How to Maintain Your Mental Wellness During the Pandemic; and
- A Virtual Integrative Stretching Class hosted by Integrative Wellness RI in partnership with Thrive.

“CODAC is providing essential health care services to the vulnerable, economically distressed families who have an opioid/substance addiction, a weakened immune system, and are experiencing unemployment and stay-at-home orders,” said Linda Hurley, CEO of CODAC Behavioral Healthcare, who exclaimed, “The truth is opioid addiction is a disease, and treatment works. The more we can remove the barriers to treatment, the closer we are to healing more people from this disease. By providing clinical support in extraordinary times, we want the community to know that they can count on CODAC during COVID-19.”

“The future is unknown. That unknown has allowed us to more adeptly focus on the NOW. Given the current circumstances, we have been forced to embrace difference. This pandemic has exposed the fragility of nearly every aspect of society,” added Beth Bixby, CEO of Tides Family Services. “Healthcare and educational systems are but a few examples of those pushed to the brink by COVID-19. This situation has laid bare racial, gender, generational, class—and a host of other—differences in ability

to respond to crises. The significant disruption in social support —could go on for many many months. It is quite lonely. Prior to COVID 19, we were in a mental health crisis, and now expect an increase with our workers on the frontlines of this pandemic. Preserving the health and safety of workers is a priority as well. To support our workers, we have seen the need to intervene to help protect their mental health, not just their physical health.”

Some of the Mental Health Month Activities Tides Family Services are conducting in May include:

- A virtual training series for community providers on a variety of topics to strengthen our collective workforce;
- A poetry contest for our youth to decrease stigma around mental health while allowing youth the opportunity both creatively express themselves and showcase their creativity;
- Virtual Self Care and well being programs for clients and staff. This will include supporting the Governor’s initiative **#RIARTS**; and
- A virtual series on maintaining healthy connections through parent support group. This will include supporting the Governor’s initiative **#it'soknottobeok**

HHP also encourages Rhode Islanders to turn to BH Link for behavioral health crises during this time. BH Link is run by HHP member organization, Community Care Alliance and is the state’s 24/7 facility for Rhode Islanders experiencing behavioral health crises, including substance use disorder, and for the families and friends of those individuals struggling to find help. In addition to the emergency triage center located at 975 Waterman Avenue in East Providence, BH Link runs a 24/7 hour hotline/helpline at **401-414-LINK (5465)**.

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