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Board of Supervisors Approves Countywide Suicide Prevention Initiative

Santa Ana, Calif. (March 13, 2018) – The Orange County Board of Supervisors announced that it has committed \$600,000 of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) monies for the creation of a countywide suicide prevention program. This funding will be given to MindOC, the fiscal entity of Be Well Orange County, an initiative bringing together public, private, academic and faith-based organizations, as well as others, to create a coordinated system of mental healthcare and support for all Orange County residents.

“As Chairwoman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, it is my duty and responsibility to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all Orange County residents. My heart goes out to families who feel they don’t have resources to help their loved ones. I want to let our constituents know that they are not alone and there is hope,” said Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District Supervisor.

In recent years, suicide rates and mental health related hospitalizations have increased throughout Orange County. The County’s per-capita rate of suicide increased 45 percent between the three-year periods of 1999 to 2001 and 2011 to 2013. This compares to an average increase of 22 percent nationwide during the same time frame, and was the largest increase in any metropolitan county in the U.S.

“Addressing mental health in our county has never been more important than right now. We need to expand our mental health services and make our community aware that there is help, and where there is help, there is hope,” said Supervisor Andrew Do, First District.

During FY 2018/19, the Orange County MHSA Steering Committee supported the recommendation to expand school-based suicide prevention campaigns and activities for students in grades K-12, as well as for transitional-age youth in higher educational and other settings. The Committee also supported several other recommendations targeting underserved individuals throughout the life span, including strategies to increase timely access to services and to promote recovery and resilience, thereby preventing suicide.

“It is my hope that MindOC helps make a greater difference in the lives of our residents. There are three words to remember: Every life matters,” said Supervisor Doug Chaffee, Fourth District.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for children and youth between the ages of 10 and 24. In Orange County, teen suicides averaged 13.3 deaths per year over the past 10-year period. Suicide is a leading cause of non-natural death for youth and teenagers between the ages of 10 and 19 years old. In Orange County, suicides accounted for 29% of non-natural deaths, making it the second leading cause of non-natural death behind motor vehicle collisions. This is higher than the statewide average in California, in which 22% of deaths among teens were due to suicides.



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For more information about suicide prevention, visit OC Health Care Agency at:
<http://www.ochealthinfo.com/suicideprevention>.

Additional Stakeholder Quotes:

Dr. Jeffry Nagel, OC Health Care Agency:

“Suicide is preventable, and that prevention requires the support of the entire community,” said Dr. Jeffrey Nagel, Director of Behavioral Health Services with the OC Health Care Agency. “This is why leveraging the efforts of so many partners through Be Well OC can make an impactful difference in helping community members become aware of warning signs and familiarize themselves with resources like the National Suicide Hotline, 1-800-273-8255, so they can be there for a friend or loved one when it matters most. Together, we need to combat the stigma surrounding suicide and have open conversations. No one can be a bystander.”

Dr. Richard Afable, Be Well OC:

“On behalf of Be Well OC, we’re inspired by the leadership of the Orange County Board of Supervisors who recognize the need for education, prevention and resources to address youth suicide in Orange County,” said Dr. Richard Afable, Be Well OC. “Prevention and early intervention are critical and are proven to change outcomes. We look forward to working together to refine a powerful plan of action to provide hope and help to our county’s youth.”

Dr. Heather Huszti, CHOC Children’s:

“We appreciate Chair Bartlett’s and the Board of Supervisors’ support of mental health and the prevention of suicide,” Dr. Heather Huszti, chief psychologist, CHOC Children’s. “Prevention efforts are crucial for our youth. While it’s painful to know that children or adolescents could consider ending their life, by acknowledging the problem, providing support and treatment, we can make a tremendous difference in the lives of our children. Childhood and adolescence are the ideal times to intervene as we know we can make a lifelong impact on their future.”

Dr. Michael Rose, Orange County Mental Health Board:

“The Orange County Mental Health Board (OCMHB) is made up of committed volunteers who are passionate about supporting and advocating for people who are struggling with mental health issues,” said Dr. Michael Rose, OCMHB Chair. “OCMHB stands ready to serve alongside the Board of Supervisors and the Behavior Health Services staff. We recognize the great opportunity that has been presented to our community today through the Board of Supervisors and we are hopeful that collectively we can push toward a significant improvement in the mental health of our community.”

Kay Warren, Co-Founder, Saddleback Church and Executive Board Member for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention:

“In response to the increased rate of suicide deaths in Orange County, we must increase public awareness of the warning signs, where to get help in a mental health crisis, and provide excellent



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treatment, care and support to vulnerable individuals,” said Kay Warren, co-founder Saddleback Church and Executive Board Member for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. “At the same time, we must recognize how being strongly connected to family, friends and their community is a protective value for those living with suicidal thoughts and do what we can to fortify those connections via upstream prevention efforts.”

Courtney Ransom, James Henry Ransom Foundation:

"Thank you to Supervisor Bartlett and the Board for recognizing and taking action on this important initiative," said Courtney Ransom, President of the James Henry Ransom Foundation. "We are hopeful that Orange County can reduce suicides, eliminate stigma and improve the overall treatment of behavioral health issues."

Margarita Solazzo, Immediate Past Chair Mission Hospital Foundation, St. Joseph Health:

"As a society, we have a responsibility to the most vulnerable in our communities to provide quality health care. Early intervention is the key to saving lives and no one entity will be able to solve the enormous mental health crisis alone," said Margarita Solazzo, immediate past chair, Mission Hospital Foundation, St. Joseph Health. "We all need to work together, each recognizing that we cannot succeed without the support and guidance of others. There is tremendous lifelong suffering that can be alleviated and eliminated by breaking down silos and collaborating to bring comprehensive solutions."

Abbey Rose, Be Well OC Youth Committee/Junior, Fountain Valley High School:

"When it comes to mental health and wellness, I believe teens want to be part of the solution," said Abbey Rose, Fountain Valley High School student and Be Well OC Committee member. "As teens, we want to help each other because we have a unique perspective that may allow us to find solutions to the struggles we see and live every day."

Luke Maxwell, U Can't B Erased:

"Throughout all my years of working in mental health, the two steps missing for many of those struggling is awareness and action," said Luke Maxwell, U Can't Be Erased. "It's my hope that this initiative will spread knowledge of mental illness and provide the resources necessary to save lives."

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