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April 24, 2020

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Gov. Wolf: Mental Health Support is Vital and Available Amid Strain of COVID-19 Pandemic

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf has made mental health access a priority during his tenure, in January introducing [Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters](#), an initiative to remove barriers to mental health care and reduce stigma. Today at a daily briefing on the commonwealth's work to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the governor highlighted that the need for accessible mental health services is greater than ever.

"We're all in this fight against COVID-19 together and, as I've said many times, we all have a part to play," Gov. Wolf said. "To be the strongest we can be in our efforts to ward off COVID-19, we need to ensure we are taking care of our mental health. So, please, if you need assistance, reach out."

It's not unusual for people to feel anxious, alone and frightened, and for some, those feelings may be surfacing for the first time during this pandemic. The Wolf Administration today conveyed that it's imperative for people to know where to turn for mental health needs.

A 2017 study from the University of Southern California indicated that approximately 1 million adult Pennsylvanians struggled with serious psychological distress at least once in 2015. Of those adults, more than 27 percent had an unmet need for mental health care. That population includes 42 percent who did not receive mental health care because they could not afford it.

According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly half (45%) of adults in the United States reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to worry and stress over COVID-19 with the burden likely to continue even as the pandemic's threat diminishes.

Mitigation efforts are necessary to save lives, but are accompanied by difficulties that strain mental health, among them, job loss, social isolation, and a general sense of uncertainty.

As unemployment compensation claims surpass 1.6 million, the commonwealth has taken steps to help to improve customer service and push out nearly \$2.5 billion in claim payments to date. Additional staff from other agencies, new hires and the help of an automated virtual phone assistant have all been deployed to get people answers more quickly, process claims, and work to lessen one significant contributor to stress.

Where lack of access to food is also a major stress point, Pennsylvanians can apply for SNAP and other helpful programs online at www.compass.state.pa.us or for immediate food assistance, Feeding Pennsylvania at www.feedingpa.org and Hunger-Free Pennsylvania at www.hungerfreepa.org are hubs of information for where people can get assistance in their communities. Also, Pennsylvanians who have found themselves food insecure as a result of COVID-19 can apply [here](#) or state and federal food assistance programs.

With plans for statewide, regional Reach Out PA roundtables on hold due to social distancing and stay-at-home orders, the governor is reminding people that there are myriad resources, many free, and some focused specifically on COVID-related mental health needs.

Available online resources:

- Pennsylvania's comprehensive mental health resources, [Mental Health in PA](#).
- [Mental Health America](#) for general information and COVID-19-specific resources.
- [Get Help Now](#) for substance use disorder and alcohol treatment.

Helpful phone numbers:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- (As Dr. Levine provides in her daily briefings): The Crisis Text Line: Text "PA" to 741-741
- Veteran Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
- Get Help Now for substance use disorder and alcohol treatment: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

For the latest information for individuals, families, businesses and schools, visit "Responding to COVID-19" on pa.gov.