

**Quality and Productivity Commission
34th Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program
"Leading with Excellence"**

2021 APPLICATION

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

NAME OF PROJECT: DMH HELP LINE: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & VETERANS LINES

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION/ADOPTION: JUNE 6, 2020

(Must have been fully implemented for a minimum of at least one year - on or before July 1, 2020)

CHECK HERE IF THIS PROJECT IS BEING SUBMITTED FOR THE COVID-19 IMPACT AWARD ONLY. (Projects must be implemented on or before December 31, 2020. **Note:** Projects implemented less than one year ago will not be eligible for any other PQA awards. In addition, once a project is submitted, you cannot submit the same project for awards consideration in subsequent years).

PROJECT STATUS: Ongoing One-time only

HAS YOUR DEPARTMENT PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED THIS PROJECT? Yes No

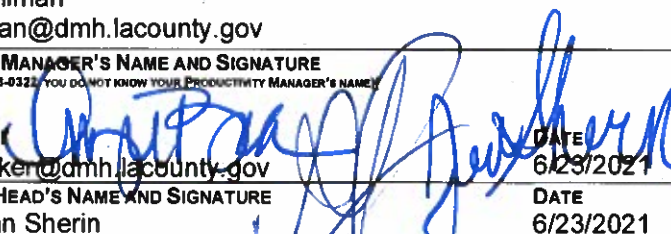
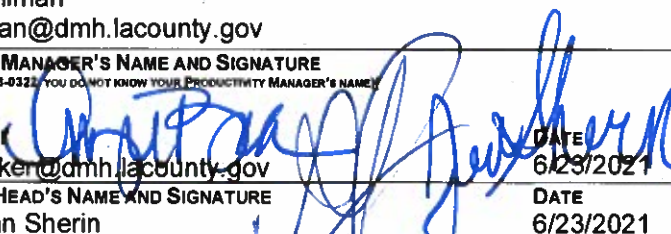
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Describe the project in 15 lines or less using Arial 12 point font. State clearly and concisely what difference the project has made.

1 The Department of Mental Health expanded its 24/7 ACCESS telephone line, now
2 referred to as the DMH Help Line, to include two new options: the Emotional Support
3 Line and the Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN) Support Line to address the
4 increased need for mental health support due to the COVID-19 Public Health
5 Emergency. While public health measures such as social distancing, isolation, and
6 quarantine are effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19, the disruption to people's
7 daily activities, routines, and livelihoods had a significant negative mental health impact.
8 These two new lines have handled over 37,000 calls from June 2020 through May 2021
9 providing much needed emotional support, community referrals and field response. By
10 providing early intervention to the Los Angeles County community at large, and more
11 specifically to the Veteran and military family members population, the Department of
12 Mental Health has prevented the need for crisis response and on-going mental health
13 treatment. In addition, the services provided on the lines provided resiliency and
14 wellbeing to the Los Angeles County community who were struggling during the COVID-
15 19 Public Health Emergency.

BENEFITS TO THE COUNTY

(1) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST AVOIDANCE	(2) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST SAVINGS	(3) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE	(1) + (2) + (3) = TOTAL ANNUAL ACTUAL/ESTIMATED BENEFIT	SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
\$	\$2,500,000	\$	\$2,500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>

ANNUAL = 12 MONTHS ONLY

SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT NAME AND COMPLETE ADDRESS Department of Mental Health 550 S. Vermont Ave., LA, CA 90005		TELEPHONE NUMBER (800) 854-7771	
PROGRAM MANAGER'S NAME Jennifer Hallman EMAIL: jhallman@dmh.lacounty.gov		TELEPHONE NUMBER 213-925-5076	
PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME AND SIGNATURE <small>(PLEASE CALL (213) 893-8322 IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME)</small> Angel Baker  Email: abaker@dmh.lacounty.gov		TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 351-1918	
DEPARTMENT HEAD'S NAME AND SIGNATURE Dr. Jonathan Sherin 		TELEPHONE NUMBER (213) 738-4601	

****ELECTRONIC, WET, OR SCANNED SIGNATURES ARE ACCEPTABLE****

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1st FACT SHEET – LIMITED UP TO 3 PAGES ONLY: Describe the **challenge(s), solution(s), and benefit(s)** of the project to the County. What quality and/or productivity-related outcome(s) has the project achieved? Provide measures of success and **specify assessment time frame**. Use Arial 12 point font.

Challenge

Based on data from the California Department of Public Health, LA County has had over 1.2 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 24,000 confirmed deaths due to COVID-19. The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency profoundly impacted LA County’s collective mental health and literature shows that those who test positive for COVID-19 have a higher risk of mental health complications. The Household Pulse Survey found symptoms of depression and anxiety increased by at least 20% in the general public during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. In addition, the collective trauma from the social isolation, closure of businesses and schools, loss of jobs, and grief over the loss of loved ones has increased the need for emotional support within our communities. Research from the [Bob Woodruff Foundation](#) demonstrates veterans are particularly vulnerable during the pandemic as job loss exacerbates mental health symptoms at a higher rate for Veterans than for non-veterans. Los Angeles County is home to more veterans than any other county in the United States. While the Veterans Administration provides healthcare and benefits to the majority of veterans in the county, it has limitations related to eligibility and comprehensiveness, including an inability to serve family members and dependents. It is estimated that close to 15% of all the veterans in Los Angeles County are not eligible for VA healthcare which leaves county services as the safety net for this vulnerable subpopulation of veterans.

Prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, the Department of Mental Health was already stretched to capacity receiving, on average, 12,000 calls to the 24/7 ACCESS line and 12,500 requests for services per month. In addition, COVID-19 created challenges for employees needing safe and productive telework options due to health vulnerabilities and COVID-related program closures.

Solution

In an effort to aggressively expand capacity to meet the surge of mental health needs due to COVID-19, address the specific needs of our Veteran population, and provide a safe telework option for staff across the County, DMH expanded the ACCESS line to create the **DMH Help Line**. The expanded DMH Help Line included a newly developed **Emotional Support Line** and **Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN) Support Line**. The goal of the expanded DMH Help Line was to provide early intervention using emotional support to prevent a crisis and/or need for on-going mental health treatment.

The lines were staffed using existing staff, serving as Disaster Service Workers, who needed a safe and productive telework option during the Public Health

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Emergency as well as by community volunteers and student interns. All staff, volunteers and interns were trained in Psychological First Aid, Domestic Violence, Suicide Prevention, Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy (CT-R) and the use of interpreters (to ensure services were available in all languages). Both lines were made available seven days a week, from 9:00am to 9:00pm.

The Emotional Support Line Provides a highly accessible, free service for individuals experiencing emotional distress with multi-language capacity. It offers Psychological First Aid related to COVID-19 stressors, referrals to community services, real-time psycho-education on mental health services and connections needed during times of stress. Simplifying the communities ability to connect to a supportive individual and access immediate emotional support is the goal of the Emotional Support Line.

The VPAN Support Line is dedicated to assisting active-duty military personnel, veterans, reservists and guard members. The peers who staff the VPAN Support Line understand the unique sacrifices and emotional needs that come with military life. The VPAN Support Line offers Psychological First Aid related to COVID-19 stressors, referrals to community services, real-time psycho-education on mental health services, and direct access to field-based teams for additional support and follow-up. Simplifying veterans and their families ability to connect and access with a helpful, caring person with similar lived experience 7 days a week is the foundation of the VPAN Support Line. Veterans and their family members in Los Angeles did not have access to such a resource prior to the VPAN support line. If a caller needs to be connected to an in-person provider, the support line enables that connection.

Benefits

The expanded DMH Help Line, specifically the Emotional Support Line and the VPAN Support Line, has significant benefits to the Los Angeles County community. It helps prevent mental health crisis including 911 calls and psychiatric hospitalization through early intervention and authentic human connection to some of our most vulnerable community members experiencing social isolation due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The Emotional Support Line and VPAN Support Line provide meaningful and relevant resources and referrals to help prevent hunger and homelessness. In addition, it provides immediate connection to emotional support with little to no waiting period.

The VPAN Support Line brings great benefits to the Veteran community. By providing a no-barrier way for veterans and their families to get a hold of someone to listen and provide resources through a culturally competent support line, the County is furthering its commitment to serve those County residents who made sacrifices on behalf of our community and country. Creating easy access will help reduce the number of veterans dying by suicide, falling into homelessness, involvement in the justice system, and costly utilization of emergency services.

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The new lines also benefit the county with FEMA-reimbursable telework opportunities for staff unable to engage in in-office work due to the pandemic. It has provided staff with safe working alternatives during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. In addition, the VPAN Support Line offers volunteers needed experience to apply for positions in the Veterans Administration. The VPAN Support Line is a substantial workforce development initiative. As the Department continues the work of recruiting and training volunteers on the VPAN support line, LA County is gaining a significant hiring pipeline of peers who come into the hiring agency with extensive training and knowledge.

Outcomes

The large number of calls to the two new lines on the DMH Help Line reflect the need for this service in the community and the success of the line. During the period of June 2020 through May 2021, the lines handled over 37,000 calls. Over this time period, monthly call volume has continued to increase. Calls were answered immediately during this time period, with an average wait time of 18 seconds. Of the over 37,000 calls, only about 3,100 ended up being transferred for crisis response and/or a mental health treatment referral. The Emotional Support Line and VPAN Support Line were successful in preventing the need for further mental health intervention at the time of the call in over 92% of the calls. To further illustrate the success of the VPAN Support Line in times when mental health treatment is needed, in March of 2021, it connected 28 Veterans to much needed field services. The number of veterans and family members getting linked to field-based teams has grown from an average of 7 per month (June 2020) to 25 per month (May 2021). For the veteran and family members population, getting them appropriately and quickly linked to services is critical given the suicide rate in the veteran population.

Since June of 2020, the Emotional Support Line has successfully staffed over 35 COVID-19 Disaster Workers (DSW) from the Department of Mental Health and the VPAN Support Line has staffed 27 DSWs from various county departments including the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Beaches and Harbors, and the Department of Mental Health. Since June 2020, the VPAN Support Line has received 74 applications for volunteers. Currently, the Emotional Support Line is staffed by thirty-two (32) DSWs while the VPAN Support Line is staffed by fifteen (15) DSWs, five (5) volunteers and sixteen (16) 1st year MSW students from various institutions. In addition, as of June 2021, one (1) former volunteer is now employed with the local Veteran Administration Hospital and three (3) other volunteers have been hired as part of the Veteran Peer Access Network.

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Linkage to the County Strategic Plan – 1 page only. Which County Strategic Plan goal(s) does this project address? Explain how. Use Arial 12-point font.

The creation of the Emotional Support Line and VPAN Support Line addresses the County Strategic Plan Goal 2 “Fostering Vibrant and Resilient Communities” as well as Goal 3 “Realizing Tomorrow’s Government Today”.

Towards Strategic Plan Goal 2 “Fostering Vibrant and Resilient Communities”, the Emotional Support Line and VPAN Support Line provide LA County residents with free compassionate mental health support and connection to needed community resources. In doing so, these trained counselors instill a sense of hope and strengthen resiliency during the COVID-10 Public Health Emergency and beyond. Having these robust, easily accessible resources help our residents to stay healthy and productive and bolsters their ability to compete for current and future high-demand jobs.

Towards Strategic Plan Goal 3 “Realize Tomorrow’s Government Today”, the Emotional Support Line and VPAN Support Line increased the government’s ability to respond to the public needs and expectations by providing an immediate response to their emotional distress during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. In an effort to maximize our resources, the Lines utilized volunteers and interns allowing us to respond to the public needs in a fiscally responsible and strategic manner. Additionally, many of these volunteers and interns have since applied for jobs within the County and may be our leaders of tomorrow.

In addition, the VPAN Support Line fits into an existing [action plan](#), a strategic plan developed as part of a series of Board Motions put forward by the LAC Board of Supervisors informed by a steering committee advisory group consisting of leaders in the veteran serving community and one representative from each board office. The action plan lays out five (5) strategic goals, one calling for veterans and their family members to be able to access care easily.

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COST AVOIDANCE, COST SAVINGS, AND REVENUE GENERATED (ESTIMATED BENEFITS TO THE COUNTY): If you are claiming cost benefits, include a calculation on this page. Please indicate whether these benefits apply in total or on a per unit basis, e.g., per capita, per transaction, per case, etc. You must include an explanation of the County cost savings, cost avoidance or new revenue that matches the numbers in the box. Remember to keep your supporting documentation. Use Arial 12-point font

Cost Avoidance: Costs that are eliminated or not incurred as a result of program outcomes. Please indicate whether these are costs to the County or to other entities.

Cost Savings: A reduction or lessening of expenditures as a result of program outcomes. Please indicate whether these were expenditures by the County or by other entities.

Revenue: Increases in existing revenue streams or new revenue sources to the County as a result of program outcomes.

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\$	\$2,500,000	\$	\$ 2,500,000	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

ANNUAL= 12 MONTHS ONLY

For Estimated Cost Savings, it was estimated that 625 of the estimated 15,929 unique callers to the new lines would have needed Specialty Mental Health Services through Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) had we not provided immediate emotional support at the time of the call.

The average annual cost of treatment for PEI is estimated to be \$4,000.

Therefore, the estimated cost savings for a 12-month period is 625 x \$4,000 which is **\$2,500,000**.