



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIRGINIA RECEIVES ADDITIONAL FEDERAL FUNDS TO OPERATE COVID-19 CRISIS COUNSELING WARM LINE THROUGH MAY 2021

The warm line supports those struggling with trauma, grief and distress caused by COVID-19

VA COPES

(877) 349-6428 Toll Free

9:00 A.M. - 9:00 P.M. Monday - Friday

5:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M. Saturday and Sunday

RICHMOND, VA – The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) announced that Virginia has received \$996,000.00 from U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the continuation of an existing crisis counseling program through May of 2021. The program, a warm line service called VA COPES, was originally established in May 2020 to help respond to the behavioral health impacts of COVID-19 using grant funds from SAMSHA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The warm line can be called toll free at (877) 349-6428 9am-9pm, Monday through Friday; and 5pm-9pm, Saturday and Sunday.

Unlike services such as 9-1-1 that are reserved for emergencies, a warm line provides someone experiencing behavioral health issues with an easy way to discuss daily struggles. DBHDS entered into an agreement with Mental Health America of Virginia (MHAVA) to provide warm line support and referral resources to Virginians impacted by COVID-19 in Virginia. DBHDS has also partnered with the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards (VACSB) to serve as the second service provider as the program has become more well-known and demand increased. These services will continue to be available to every citizen in the Commonwealth.

“As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, providing this service for Virginians is more important than ever,” **said DBHDS Commissioner Alison Land.** “Prolonged social distancing and change to normal routine, as well as the fear associated with a pandemic, can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and grief, as well as isolation from your normal support system. We’re grateful to our partners at MHAVA and VACSB for working with us to connect individuals to trained listeners and resources they need at this most critical time.”

Since its creation in May 2020, the VA COPES warm line has assisted over 280 callers, with more than 70 of those calls lasting longer than 15 minutes. VA COPES Crisis Counselors receive core content training from SAMHSA, and DBHDS has utilized grant funding to provide Stress First Aid training and Psychological First Aid that have been adapted for COVID specific interactions. Counselors learn to assist callers with positive adaptive coping skills and problem solving to produce a sense of hope and resiliency. In its outreach, VA COPES has specifically targeted those directly impacted by the pandemic, high population regions, rural areas, essential workers, unemployed Virginians, and populations with access and functional needs.

Common COVID-19 issues are loneliness, fear of uncertainty, old grief returning, anxiety about health or infection, workplace or financial stress, sleep trouble, drinking more alcohol/using prescription medications more than usual. Find more DBHDS' resources to help at www.dbhds.virginia.gov/covid19.

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The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) seeks to promote dignity, choice, recovery, and the highest possible level of participation in work, relationships, and all aspects of community life for individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities or substance-use disorders. DBHDS operates 12 state facilities and partners with 40 locally-run community services boards and hundreds of private providers statewide. For more information, please visit www.dbhds.virginia.gov, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#).