



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT:** Lauren Cunningham

lauren.cunningham@dbhds.virginia.gov

**VIRGINIA RECEIVES FEDERAL PERMISSION TO EXTEND COVID-19 CRISIS COUNSELING WARMLINE  
UNTIL DECEMBER 1, 2021**

*The warmline 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 an extension from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the continuation of an existing crisis counseling program through November of 2021. The program, a warmline 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 warmline can be called or texted 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 warmline 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 (MHAV) to provide warmline 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 individual in the Commonwealth.

“While the COVID-19 vaccine has given us all reason to be hopeful, we know that we will be dealing with the effects of the pandemic, especially for mental health, for some time to come,” **said DBHDS Commissioner Alison Land.** “The VA COPES warmline provides individuals struggling with the anxiety, stress, isolation, and grief of COVID-19 with not only a trained counselor on the other end of the line ready to listen, but a connection to so many important resources that can assist them through this time. We are incredibly grateful to SAMSHA and our partners at MHAV and VACSB for making it possible for the warmline to keep helping Virginians in the months to come.”

Since its creation in May 2020, the VA COPES warmline has assisted over 3,000 callers, with 646 of those calls lasting longer than 15 minutes. Call volume has increased dramatically since its creation, including a 59% increase in calls over the last three months (January-March 2021) compared to the previous three (October-December 2020). As part of their outreach for the warmline, VA COPES staff has networked and collaborated with over 1,188 organizations and individuals across Virginia, with a focus on individuals directly impacted by the pandemic, high population regions, rural areas, essential workers, unemployed Virginians, and populations with

access and functional needs. Spanish-speaking counselors are available, as well as translation services for additional languages.

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.

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](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/covid19) and learn more about VA COPES at [VACOPES.com](http://VACOPES.com).

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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](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#).*