

For Immediate Release

### **Southwest Montana COAD Mental Health Team Reports Shift in Community Needs**

**May 18, 2020 – Bozeman, MT** – Help Center 211 has reported that the need for its resource, referral, and crisis lines are up by nearly 49% since March. Over the course of this pandemic, they have seen a shift in the needs of callers. In March, 82% of callers were looking for help with basic needs such as food, housing, or financial assistance. In April, 60% of the calls were about mental health-related concerns. This shift has the attention of mental health providers across the valley, including members of the Southwest Montana Community Organizations Active in Disaster (SWMT COAD) Mental Health sub-committee. They are, in turn, finding innovative ways to provide resources to those in need.

“As a mental health community, we understand the need for our neighbors to access the right care, at the right time,” explains Michael Foust, Area Director at Western Montana Mental Health Center.

“We recognize that there are many barriers that discourage people from obtaining assistance until they are at a place of emotional distress or crisis. As a result, our community has created urgent care services to provide immediate access to mental health services and mental health co-responder programs, which we hope will reduce the fear of calling 911. Our mental health needs attending to as critically as our physical health, so we encourage people to seek help without delay.”

Fortunately, community organizations and individuals are rising to meet the need through new services and increased access, so that recovery continues to be possible, despite new challenges faced by COVID-19. Here are a variety of examples:

- Through enhanced collaboration in response to COVID-19, Bozeman Health, Western Montana Mental Health Center – Gallatin, and Help Center 211 has rolled out a Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center to increase access to urgent healthcare needs related to mental health.
- Community Health Partners has increased the capacity to offer behavioral health services virtually and in-person to address the increased need for support that this pandemic has brought forth.
- Help Center 211 hosts a directory of area mental health professionals and recently made this available via their website in an online directory in partnership with WIM Tracking and local therapists in the region to help people locate and connect with clinicians who are a good fit for their needs.
- Therapists in private practice in the region have developed the capacity to serve clients remotely to ensure healthy and safe practices are in place to avoid disruption in care.
- Elevating Behavioral Health, a local coalition of organizations invested in improving behavioral health in our community continues to work to raise awareness about mental health and well-being through various campaigns. Having recently partnered with the creators of Man Therapy™ to bring the content to Montana, EBH hopes to engage men (and the people who care about men) to invest in their mental health, especially in times of great stress.

A silver lining of the current circumstances is the innovation and creativity that individuals are bringing to problems that we may not have imagined had things continued in the pre-COVID ways. The mental health community is dedicated to move forward stronger in how they support those with mental health struggles.

“We are here for anyone that needs support. Everyone is experiencing this pandemic differently and we want to be here for whatever situation or emotions they may be facing,” says Mandy St. Aubyn, Help Center Development & Communications Coordinator. “We know reaching out for help can feel scary, but we want callers to know there is a friendly voice and local help on the other end of the line by calling 211.”

Interestingly, one out of ten callers to Help Center 211 are concerned family or friends calling to seek guidance and support in order to help a loved one they are concerned about. In addition to helping individuals in crisis, Help Center 211 is able to offer helpful guidance to individuals looking to be a support to a friend, family member or even neighbor in crisis.

“Having conversations about topics such as suicide, substance abuse, depression or other concerns can feel daunting,” explains St. Aubyn. “We can walk people through how to approach the conversation, assess how involved they can be, and how to get the person of concern connected to help. Community members watching out for each other is vital, especially in times like these.”

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**About SWMT COAD** Officially founded in June 2018, the Southwest Montana COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disasters) is an association of local organizations assisting our communities to be mobilized and prepared for disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic through coordination, preparation, education, and implementation serving Gallatin, Madison, and Park Counties.

If individuals or families are in crisis, suicidal, need emotional support, or require emergency food, housing, transportation, financial or other social assistance, they should call **211**. **211** is an information and resource line and crisis response call center answered by Help Center 211 for calls made in the Southwest Montana region. Referrals to the appropriate source(s) of assistance will be made.

For COAD media inquiries, including possible interviews with mental health professionals, please contact Rachel Allen at [SWMTCOAD@gmail.com](mailto:SWMTCOAD@gmail.com).

The most accurate local source of information on COVID-19 remains the Gallatin City-County Health Department website <https://www.healthygallatin.org/coronavirus-covid-19/>.