



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**MAYOR LONDON BREED ANNOUNCES EXPANDED
MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS
AND ALL HEALTH CARE EMPLOYEES**

The City and County of San Francisco launches "Heal San Francisco" to expand mental health support for all health care workers; increases mental health resources for first responders and City employees

San Francisco, CA — Mayor London N. Breed today announced enhanced mental health resources designed specifically for the City's first responders, and expanded mental health services for all frontline health care workers throughout San Francisco. Combined, these new resources will help the City build resiliency and recover from the trauma caused by COVID-19.

The City and County of San Francisco is partnering with Cordico, a phone-based wellness application, to provide a customizable wellness application for use by all City first responders. The application will connect employees to newly expanded City mental health resources and existing resources within each department. These expanded resources, coordinated through the San Francisco Health Service System, will include additional employee counseling services and 24/7 mental health care for all City employees.

"This is a really difficult time for all San Franciscans, and it's especially challenging for our health care workers and first responders who are working long hours and under incredibly stressful conditions," said Mayor Breed. "Just as they are taking care of us, we need to take care of them. The impacts of this pandemic are not limited to the virus itself, which is why these expanded mental health resources are so important."

"These are stressful times for everyone, but our courageous health care workers and first responders are undeniably facing the worst of it," said Supervisor Rafael Mandelman. "Providing access to critical mental health resources will ensure our frontline workers can continue to show up and save lives every day. I want to thank Mayor Breed and her team for their work to support the mental health of these brave heroes."

"Our first responders are all working around the clock in this unprecedented crisis, and we owe it to them to support their physical and mental wellbeing in any way we can," said Supervisor Catherine Stefani. "I know that some of us suffer from anxiety, depression, or addiction, for example, and times like this make it more difficult to process all that we are hearing, reading and experiencing. I want everyone, especially our first responders, to know that you are not alone and there is help out there. There is absolutely no shame in needing and seeking help with any of these issues."



The existing Employee Assistance Program will be expanded to provide 24/7 one-on-one counseling for any first responder and City employee in need. If employees require long-term mental health counseling, they will be connected to mental health professionals provided by their health care plans, including Kaiser, Blue Shield of California, and United Health Care.

In addition to the expanded services specifically targeted for first responders, Mayor Breed also announced the launch of ‘Heal San Francisco,’ a comprehensive effort to provide immediate and coordinated mental health services for public, private, and non-profit health care workers. The mental health effort will be implemented by the Heal San Francisco Rapid Response Team, which is led by Our Children Our Families (OCOF) Council in partnership with the Department of Public Health and UCSF. OCOF is an initiative under the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families.

The Heal San Francisco Rapid Response Team has partnered with the Bay Area Chapter of the COVID-19 Pro Bono Counseling Project to expand access to counseling and mental health support for public, private, and non-profit health care providers in need of immediate, short-term support. Heal San Francisco will leverage the support of 375 licensed clinicians, representing diverse backgrounds and multilingual expertise, who will volunteer their time throughout the duration of this crisis to provide the mental health care to support frontline health care staff. Health care workers who need assistance should speak with their supervisor or human resources department to be connected with a pro bono clinician.

Additionally, Heal San Francisco will convene a panel of trauma and stress experts to advise on how to better deliver trauma-informed mental health care through San Francisco’s existing health care and community-based service systems. This clinical advisory group will help promote and align strategies to buffer and potentially mitigate the impacts of prolonged stress on our residents.

Currently, there is a global experience of mass trauma related to COVID-19 and this experience will impact our health and wellbeing beyond the length of this pandemic. Heal San Francisco will work to promote mental wellbeing citywide, and will coordinate between different health plans and service agencies, ensure access to mental health resources, and promote collaboration across public, nonprofit and volunteer efforts. A future expansion of the Heal San Francisco initiative will look to provide mental health care services to a broader citywide population.

For more information about Heal San Francisco, go to <https://healsanfrancisco.org/>.

“Emergency workers are prone to absorbing high levels of stress under normal circumstances. We are concerned that the prolonged stress and unprecedented demand on our front-line workers during this pandemic may create psychological trauma,” said Abbie Yant, Executive Director of the San Francisco Health Service System. “We want to mitigate the trauma by seamlessly connecting our workforce to the psychological support they need.”



“Our police officers are out day and night protecting our city, and as is the case with many others throughout the city and this country, the COVID-19 pandemic has added a new layer of stress and anxiety for these frontline responders,” said Police Chief William Scott. “By providing wellbeing resources and 24/7 counseling, we can support our officers in this time of crisis.”

“Our firefighters, paramedics, and EMTs deal with trauma and stress on a daily basis, even more so as they are on the front lines of this public health crisis. We need to make sure our members have the resources and capability to take care of their mental health, now more than ever. This resource will be vital in addressing these issues and supporting our employees and their families,” said Fire Chief Jeanine R. Nicholson.

“Coordinating a response is complex and requires a dedicated effort to align and leverage all of the amazing work happening across our city. I’m proud that OCOF can support our city in partnership with so many others. This is the community coming together,” says Dr. Pegah Faed, Director of Our Children Our Families Council.

“COVID-19 is a new adversity for all of us, and while we build a coordinated medical response we must address the fears and emotional exhaustion of our community and workforce,” says Dr. Alicia Lieberman, UCSF’s Child Trauma Research Program and nationally recognized trauma expert supporting the Heal San Francisco Rapid Response Team. “In this regard, we must seize the opportunity as Dr. Ken Epstein states, ‘to prevent and buffer the impacts of a second and silent epidemic related to the short and long-term impact of chronic stress on the physical and mental health of our health care first responders.’”

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