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FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY AND LINDA ROSENBERG, MSW UNVEIL NEW WHITE PAPER: A PATH FORWARD: MENTAL HEALTH AND THE UNITED STATES PANDEMIC RESPONSE

NEW YORK – New York City's First Lady and ThriveNYC Founder, Chirlane McCray and Director of External Relations Columbia University Department of Psychiatry, Linda Rosenberg, MSW today unveiled a new white paper highlighting the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing mental health crisis Americans face. The paper outlines how this public health crisis in the United States is not only a crisis of infectious disease, with deaths and infections increasing steadily across the nation, but how the pandemic brings a crisis of mental health as well.

"There is no health without mental health. Generations of Americans will feel the residual mental health effects of the pandemic across their lifetimes, and we need to ensure that all people, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to mental health support," said **First Lady McCray**. "While governments across the country seek solutions to keep people safe from this deadly virus, they must also identify and support innovations that will eliminate the inequities in mental health care access that will be further exacerbated by this pandemic."

"It's been a privilege to work with First Lady Chirlane McCray and her leadership team, as they've built a ThriveNYC infrastructure that delivers information and helps our city's residents, said **Linda Rosenberg MSW, Columbia University Department of Psychiatry**. "Now, as we look toward new leadership in Washington, we hope the lessons learned in New York City and other cities that have been committed to improving mental health and addictions literacy and services, help to build a national roadmap for creating a seamless network of systems and organizations delivering prevention, treatment and support to all Americans."

This white paper outlines how the best defenses against the virus, social distancing and isolation, are primary risk factors for a range of poor mental health outcomes. It suggests that by addressing the pandemic compassionately in a way that keeps communities and families safe from harm, means urgently preparing to meet the current and future mental health needs that will come with COVID-19. Government is positioned to lead through policy and regulation, setting standards, and advancing funding priorities. Advocates and providers are essential to ensure that policies meet the needs of our nation's most vulnerable and that mental health care is delivered equitably. And philanthropy and civic-minded private funders are poised to support innovations in care. Mitigating the mental health effects of COVID-19 is possible but will take all of us together under a united, cross-sector approach.

The white paper offers three priority goals and organized strategies to improve the mental health of our communities:

1. Ensure that effective mental health care is accessible for all, regardless of ability to pay, area of residence, or citizenship status;

2. Support the mental health of young people as an upstream investment in long-term prevention, since children and youth will experience the residual mental health effects of the pandemic across their lifetimes, and a majority of mental health disorders become apparent during the teen and young adult years;

3. Eliminate inequities in mental health care access and outcomes that will be exacerbated by the pandemic and use public policy as a vehicle for racial equity and social justice.

To successfully meet the nation's mental health needs as part of a pandemic response, it is paramount that the nation achieves these priority goals. Improving our nation's mental health is a long-term investment in our future, and the strategies outlined in this report are necessary steps in the wake of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in a matter of months. No community in the United States remains untouched by the virus. As infections and deaths continue to rise, COVID-19 presents a public health crisis on a scale that has not been seen in the last 100 years. In addition to the physical health harms posed by COVID-19, the social distancing that is our best defense against community spread increases the potential for population and individual mental health distress. Isolation is associated with a host of physical and mental health conditions and may be compounded by the economic strain that the shutdowns precipitated and the collective and individual grief that come with such a profound loss of life.

For individuals living with mental illness, these harms may be more acute. Taken together, the pandemic and its ripple effects affect the safety of our communities. To alleviate ongoing and prevent future suffering, the nation has a responsibility to treat the pandemic as a crisis of mental health alongside a crisis of infectious disease and use our current moment as an opportunity to rethink mental health policy at all levels of government and across the private and civil sector.

The white paper argues that effective mental health care must be accessible for all, regardless of ability to pay, area of residence, or citizenship status. Governments and societies must support the mental health of young people as an upstream investment in long-term prevention, since children and youth will experience the residual mental health effects of the pandemic across their lifetimes. Additionally, there must be a plan to eliminate inequities in mental health care access and outcomes and use public policy as a vehicle for equity and racial justice.

Meeting these goals will require all people whose work touches mental health to come together across government, the private sector, and civil society. Additionally, each have a distinct and important role to play, and the urgency with which we must come together to meet the challenges of COVID-19 cannot be understated. While federal and state governments can lead through policy, implementing policies on the ground and in communities at the local or

neighborhood level requires the robust support of leaders across advocacy, service provision, business, technology, and philanthropy, each of whom are poised to act. The mental health of the nation depends on all of us.

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