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**A RECOVERY FOR ALL OF US: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES EXPANSION
OF TELE-MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO ADDRESS DISPARATE IMPACT OF
COVID-19 ON COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

*'Communities Thrive' will bring culturally responsive mental health support to neighborhoods
hardest-hit by COVID-19*

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced the relaunch of Communities Thrive, a \$3.7 million, two-year investment in addressing the mental health needs of underserved New Yorkers. Through Communities Thrive, organizations representing Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, and Latinx New Yorkers will develop community-driven strategies to promote mental health and will directly connect people who need care to tele-mental health services at NYC Health + Hospitals.

“COVID-19 has taken a tremendous emotional toll on communities of color across our city,” **said Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “To get people the help they need we must destigmatize and demystify mental health services. Communities Thrive will do just that, helping our hardest hit communities recover together.”

“Now, more than ever, communities of color need support as COVID-19 has shaken their sense of stability and emotional well-being,” **said First Lady Chirlane McCray**. “Communities Thrive is about bringing the mental health services people need, closer to where they live, in a setting where they feel comfortable. “With this program, we’re breaking barriers to care to help communities of color come back healthier and stronger after this pandemic.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, AAPI, Black and Latinx New Yorkers were at greater risk of mental health needs yet receive less mental health care than white New Yorkers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these longstanding challenges and disparities, with widespread loss, economic hardship and exposure to discrimination or xenophobia contributing to increases in depression, anxiety, grief, and trauma.

Communities Thrive, which will be overseen by the Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC, will address critical barriers to mental health care New Yorkers of color face, including neighborhoods with too few mental health providers, a shortage of providers trained to provide culturally or linguistically competent care, stigma, and lack of medical insurance. Greater consideration will be given to proposals that include a geographic focus within the 33 neighborhoods designated by

the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity as disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and/or with significant racial and economic disparities in health outcomes, as well as other equity burdens identified by the City.

Communities Thrive will add mental health support to organizations New Yorkers already rely on for other needs. Studies show that locating mental health support in culturally responsive, community-based organizations and health care providers can mitigate barriers to care ([source](#); [source](#)). By integrating tele-mental health into primary care practices and community-based organizations already serving Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, and Latinx New Yorkers, Communities Thrive will offer trusted organizations new resources to address the mental health needs of their clients.

The Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC plans to award three contracts as part of this demonstration project. These contracts will go to three Community Anchors, one serving Asian American and Pacific Islander New Yorkers, one serving Black New Yorkers, and one serving Latinx New Yorkers. Each Community Anchor will serve as a project manager, leading a program to address the mental health needs of a sub-population particularly at risk of mental health issues and whose needs are unmet. Each Community Anchor will partner with five community-based organizations and five primary care practices already serving this sub-population into which the tele-mental health services can be embedded. Community Anchors will also oversee the development of a public awareness campaign to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior.

Clients who need mental health support will be directly connected to NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) for ongoing tele-mental health care. Tele-mental health services can be provided safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, and evidence shows that tele-mental health services can match in-person services both in terms of quality of care and patient outcomes. Tele-mental health services have also been shown to expand access to reduce stigma by allowing clients to access treatment where and when they feel comfortable, in privacy ([source](#)) and promote linguistic access by providing services in multiple languages. Asian adults, for example, have reported difficulty accessing mental health services due to systemic and linguistic barriers.

The nation's largest public health system, H+H began providing tele-health services early on in the COVID-19 pandemic and has since provided more than one million sessions remotely, including approximately 200,000 tele-mental health visits. Communities Thrive will help link this newly-developed capacity with the communities that need it most – through organizations they trust.

While COVID-19 has had a [profound and disparate impact](#) on the mental health of New Yorkers, the need for more effective mental health support among communities of color was significant long before the pandemic:

- In 2017, 76% of US-born Asian American/Pacific Islander New Yorkers with depression reported that there was a time in the past 12 months when they needed treatment for a mental health problem but did not get it.

- Nationally, Black adults are 10% more likely to report serious psychological distress than white adults.
- Latinx New Yorkers display higher rates of depression (12%) than white New Yorkers (8%). However, white New Yorkers suffering from depression are more likely to engage in treatment for mental health problems (58%) than Latinx New Yorkers suffering from depression (39%).

Communities Thrive aims to support communities of color in shaping how and where mental health support is delivered and in exploring new ways to address longstanding barriers to care.

The complete Request for Proposals is available [here](#). Proposals are due on April 23, 2021 at 2:00pm. Questions regarding this project should be emailed to thrivenyc@cityhall.nyc.gov by April 2, 2021 at 2:00 pm. A request for proposals the Communities Thrive demonstration project was initially issued in March 2020 and paused in April 2020 due to the fiscal climate and public health emergency.

“By integrating tele-mental health support into the practices of community health providers and social service organizations New Yorkers already turn to for assistance, Communities Thrive will expand mental health services to more New Yorkers in need,” **said Susan Herman, Director of the Mayor’s Office of ThriveNYC.**

“The City’s public hospital system is proud to continue to partner with sister agencies to further provide critical mental health support to all who need the support during these trying times,” **said NYC Health + Hospitals Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Charles Baron, MD.** “We’ve unfortunately been witness to a number of crises during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the current mental health crisis we are committed to combat. By utilizing new tools, like telemedicine, we will meet New Yorkers where they are and eliminate barriers to such important care.”

"New Yorkers are in desperate need of mental health services and resources, especially those in our underserved communities of color. A robust language access program, in particular, is necessary now for my community and many others to overcome long-standing barriers to mental wellness. As our city begins to move towards recovery, and we need to stop sweeping these issues under the rug so that every community has equal access to these services and the ability to get back on their feet," **said Council Member Peter Koo.**

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