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MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY ANNOUNCE TWO COMMUNITY CLINICS IN PUERTO RICO RECEIVE \$200,000 TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Visit follows through with commitment made by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and Hispanic Federation to support the island's recovery efforts following Hurricane Maria

NEW YORK — Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray today announced two clinics in Puerto Rico will receive \$200,000 to hire mental health professionals who will offer support to communities in Puerto Rico. The announcement follows through with a commitment made by the City in March to increase mental health services on the island as it continues recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Maria, which swept through in September 2017.

The funding provides a two-year grant of \$100,000 each to two health centers, which will be used to increase mental health staff and services at each facility. The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City provided a \$100,000 grant to the Hispanic Federation's UNIDOS Disaster Relief & Recovery Program. The Hispanic Federation matched the grant, bringing the total new support for community health centers in Puerto Rico to \$200,000.

"New York City and Puerto Rico have a deep bond, and the struggles of their residents are our struggles too," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "Hurricane Maria devastated people on the island, both physically and mentally. This initiative will help make sure some of Puerto Rico's most vulnerable residents have access to the mental health services they may need as they continue rebuilding their lives."

"We are thrilled to announce funding for two Health ProMed facilities serving Puerto Rican communities with especially high needs," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "These community health centers will be able to fully address the behavioral health needs of patients who have suffered the worst of Hurricane Maria's devastation. When people walk into a health center, we want them to get ALL the care they need."

"As families in Puerto Rico rebuild their homes and communities after Hurricane Maria, the lingering mental and emotional effects after experiencing such natural disaster must also be addressed as people rebuild their lives," said **Dr. Herminia Palacio, Deputy Mayor for Health**

and Human Services. “This investment will give these two clinics the resources they need to ensure continued access to critical, community-based mental health care.”

"In the wake of tragedy, New Yorkers have time and again partnered in powerful ways with the City and the Mayor’s Fund to help those in need,” said **Darren Bloch, Senior Advisor to the Mayor and Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships.** “Thank you to the dynamic mix of non-profit, corporate, and individual supporters who helped contribute over \$1.7 million in funding and goods for Hurricane Maria relief – the work was a true testament of how strong we stand with our Puerto Rican brothers and Sisters as they continue to recover from this tragedy"

The two centers receiving funding are located in Vieques and Culebra, two offshore islands east of Puerto Rico. Both centers are operated by HealthproMed, an organization that has been serving the Puerto Rican community for 30 years by assuring access to health care services to the uninsured and underserved population as well as to the Medicaid patients. Residents in Vieques and Culebra have been facing serious challenges to access continuity of care as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which swept through the island in September 2017.

HealthproMed Vieques

HealthProMed Vieques was the only healthcare provider ready to respond 48 hours after Hurricane Maria, and still operates with the help of a power generator.

With the funding, HealthProMed Vieques will increase its weekly schedule for mental health providers with two psychologists, including one dedicated to child and adolescents. The health center currently has a psychologist who offered services once a week. A psychiatrist will be at the clinic at least twice a month.

HealthproMed Culebra

HealthproMed Culebra was severely impacted by the hurricane, and continues operating with the help of a power generator. It currently has one social worker, one psychologist and a health educator, who offer services at the community health center twice a month. With the additional funding, the community health center will increase its schedule for mental health providers and will add a psychiatrist twice a month.

“More than a year later, New Yorkers once again demonstrate their steadfast commitment to helping Puerto Rico with its long-term recovery,” said **Mayor’s Fund Executive Director Toya Williford.** “We thank the Hispanic Federation for their partnership in helping secure these critical mental health services, and also thank every New Yorker who donated to relief and recovery efforts in Hurricane Maria’s devastating aftermath.”

“When I visited Puerto Rico last fall, I encountered so many stories of people in despair,” said **Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot.** “The increase in suicides among Puerto Ricans after Hurricane Maria, including among young children, is devastating. This is a much needed investment in mental health services to help Puerto Ricans heal and move forward.”

“Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray, New York City continues to support Puerto Rico during its time of greatest need. Our organizational mandate is to support actions that can help Puerto Rico rise up better, stronger and more self-sufficient,” said **José Calderón, President of the Hispanic Federation**. “Puerto Rico is having a serious mental health crisis, and we’re especially grateful that our city’s First Lady has taken a leading role to support and shine a light on the mental health needs of our neighbors on the island. We are very proud to work with Mayor de Blasio, the First Lady and The Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City to increase behavioral health services at community health centers in Puerto Rico. It is essential support that will help provide critical help for many of our people on the island.”

“For HealthproMed, but moreover, for our patients in Vieques and Culebra, this funding represents the opportunity to have appropriate access to mental health care services on their island and represent respect for their dignity as well,” said **Ivonne Rivera Hernandez, Executive Director of HealthproMed**. “HealthproMed deeply thanks Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray for this humanitarian action and for their solidarity with Vieques and Culebra. This action speaks volumes about Mayor de Blasio and the First Lady, about their humanity and nobility.”

This funding builds on the City’s ongoing efforts to provide support and relief to Puerto Ricans after Hurricane Maria. After the hurricane, more than 300 city employees also deployed to aid in the recovery efforts, representing nearly 20 agencies, including the Office of Emergency Management, the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Department of Sanitation and the Department of Buildings. Through public-private partnerships, the Mayor’s Fund helped provide over \$1.5 million worth of supplies to the relief effort.

The island also received a \$30,000 grant from the Mayor’s Fund to the International Medical Corps to support the deployment of mobile medical units that provide primary care to hurricane-affected residents without access to health facilities. The Mayor’s Fund also provided \$70,000 to the Hispanic Federation’s UNIDOS Disaster Relief & Recovery Program to support other relief and recovery projects in Puerto Rico.

In March, a 12-person team of mental and behavioral health experts from the New York City Health Department were deployed to train school staff across Puerto Rico in psychological first aid for students who have experienced trauma and emotional challenges in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The trainings focused on stress management, self-care, and the importance of seeking mental health support for early intervention, and are based on evidence-based practice that reduces Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“The incidence of individuals facing mental health issues in Puerto Rico has significantly increased in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Meanwhile, access to adequate health care and other human services remain limited. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for once again standing in solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico by joining efforts with the Hispanic Federation UNIDOS Disaster Relief and Recovery Program to financially support two key mental health clinics in Vieques and Culebra,” said **Congressman Jose Serrano**.

“Maria wrought devastation on Puerto Rico on many levels, not least of which is the mental health toll that has been inflicted on the Island's residents, something tragically evidenced by the increased suicide rate. These additional resources will help those who need it most and I applaud the City for taking this step. New York shares a deep bond with Puerto Rico and we must continue doing all we can to assist our brothers and sisters in their time of need,” said **Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez.**

“Mental health has historically been given less attention than it deserves, and as Puerto Rico recovers from Hurricane Maria, it is important that mental health services are just as readily available as any other medical service. I commend the Mayor’s office for recognizing this need and providing grants to provide mental health staffers at two of Puerto Rico’s hospitals,” said **Congressman Gregory W. Meeks.**

Congresswoman Grace Meng, said, “As a Member of Congress who has fought to help Puerto Rico recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria, I commend the Mayor and First Lady for allocating these critical funds,” said U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens). “Earlier this year, I traveled to the island to assess recovery efforts and saw that mental health services are among the many needs. Mayor de Blasio’s funding will help ensure that this important care is provided, and I’m proud to join the Mayor in announcing it. I thank the de Blasio administration for its continuing commitment to assist the people of Puerto Rico. I also applaud the Hispanic Federation for matching these crucial funds, and for all the work the organization has done to help the island get back on its feet. We continue to stand with our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico!”

“I commend Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray on today’s announcement to support two clinics in Puerto Rico to help recruit and train mental health practitioners and provide mental health support across the island,” said **Congressman Adriano Espaillat.** “The American citizens of Puerto Rico have suffered tremendous emotional despair for over a year following the Trump Administration’s failed response to help residents recover. New York City has stood with our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico since the day of the storm, and we will continue to lend our support to help residents along this journey to getting their daily lives back on track.”

"Beyond the physical damage Hurricane Maria wreaked on Puerto Rico, it also caused much mental suffering among its people. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray for their effort to address this critical issue among the island's long suffering residents," said **State Senator Luis Sepulveda.**

“For those affected by the devastation that Maria left in its wake, mental healthcare is pivotal to the recovery of the Island,” said **State Senator-elect Jessica Ramos.** “More than a year after the devastation there is still much to do, and this support will go a long way to help the island during the continued rebuilding process. The City’s continued assistance over the last year sets an example that we serve as a support to our neighbors, and I hope we can continue to drive more to support restoration of Puerto Rico’s essential systems.”

“Puerto Rico still needs a great amount of support for recovery efforts. The Mayor's commitment of financial assistance will help immensely. Puerto Rico needs our help and today's

announcement represents a major step forward,” said **Assembly Assistant Speaker Félix W Ortiz**.

"After a natural disaster of the caliber of Hurricane Maria, mental health services are key to helping restore the lives of the affected. I commend Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray for their commitment to our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters. Puerto Rico still needs our help and we are all committed to ensuring they rise stronger than ever," said **Assembly Member-elect Catalina Cruz**.

“Hurricane Maria triggered various mental health challenges for the people of Puerto Rico, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This funding will help connect victims to the crucial services they need as they continue to adjust to the aftermath of the natural disaster. As the Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, I thank Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray for investing in this much-needed initiative,” said **Council Member Diana Ayala**.

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