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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY APPEAR ON MSNBC'S  
MORNING JOE**

**Joe Scarborough:** This week, we started talking about hope. Hope is, we watched the first Americans get the COVID vaccine, but we still obviously have a long way to go especially as America heads into the winter. Morning Joe Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Dave Campbell reports on the mental health crisis that's continuing to explode because of the pandemic.

**Dr. Dave Campbell:** Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 an estimated one in five New Yorkers, struggled with mental health issues, which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. With widespread vaccination projected to begin by spring or summer, people are facing many more months of restrictions and isolation as this dark winter approaches.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Mental health used to be swept under the rug. It used to be a second class citizen of health care. It can't be anymore. It needs to be front and center. The coronavirus crisis will actually be more lasting in its mental health implications than its physical health implications. And we've got to do something about that now.

**Dr. Campbell:** There are over 33,000 young people dealing with trauma and homelessness in New York City. Covenant House New York has ramped up its operations throughout the pandemic to provide round-the-clock support, shelter, and nutrition to the city's youth in need.

**Samantha Alvarez Benowitz:** We were seeing a lot of young people who understandably were scared and anxious and feeling, you know, more hopeless and more depressed. We started offering tele-health therapy sessions. What we've learned is that most of our young people prefer in-person therapy. We reconfigured large spaces so that we can sit with them safely, six feet apart, and with masks on.

**Dr. Campbell:** Hazelden Betty Ford clinic supports those suffering from substance misuse and relapse, which has spiked during the pandemic.

**Dr. Eliana Leve:** We do have, I would say, more relapses than before. People are dreading the change of season, dreading the prolonged isolation, not being able to socialize.

**Dr. Campbell:** Has the stigma affected your population anymore because of the pandemic and the isolation?

**Dr. Leve:** Shame and stigma really have been the silent killer for behavioral health conditions. We are now able to provide virtual services for people who don't reside in the city. Over 50 percent of our clients stated that they would actually continue virtual services.

**Dr. Campbell:** Dr. Emmanuel Fombu is on the forefront of the movement for better mental and physical health care through technology innovation. What are some innovations and methods you see in a post pandemic world?

**Dr. Emmanuel Fombu:** Even pre-COVID, right, we all had all these conditions that existed, but everyone had access to care. And COVID had just exposed that side of the world and I've made it a goal of mine to make sure we create awareness around mental health. And there's no one solution for everything. We need to have a holistic approach to any disease, especially mental health. You could have the drug, but peer support could be important to you at the right place at the right time. Maybe a drug is supportive for you in the morning. Maybe in the afternoon, might be a chat with a peer. So, it's the idea of having this personalized approach to medicine driven by data so we could make more informed decisions at the right time.

**Dr. Campbell:** A city-wide initiative was launched by Mayor de Blasio's wife, First Lady Chirlane McCray, to facilitate round-the-clock mental health resources.

**Mayor:** What Chirlane did with Thrive was make mental health available to everyone, starting with a hotline that anyone could call 24/7 and get support and get help. That's something that could be achieved anywhere in America, including rural areas that needed the most, where there may not be health care nearby.

**First Lady Chirlane McCray:** As a country, we need to think about integrating mental health care with our primary care. Stigma is our biggest problem. No matter who I talk to, it's the first issue that comes up. We're not built to hold onto all of these emotions by ourselves. We need others. And that's why this pandemic has been so difficult because isolation is a kind of punishment for us. We can prevent crises. We don't want people to get to the point where they feel like there's nowhere to turn, there's nothing that they can do, and they feel driven to take their own life or to use heavy drugs. We don't want people to reach that stage. There's always hope and there's always help. You just have to reach out. That's the first step to getting out of the sorrow, out of the sadness, out of the pain that we're in.

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