



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND THE CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
ANNOUNCE EXPANDED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS AMID COVID-19
RESPONSE**

CHICAGO - Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) today announced a package of mental health supports for Chicago residents who may be facing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has impacted the psychological and emotional wellbeing of many people, with national surveys indicating increased levels of social isolation, stress, and worries about the future. The City is responding by piloting new approaches to mental health services that will increase access for Chicagoans who may want additional support.

“The COVID-19 crisis has been hard on all of us and its challenges have taken many forms – including challenges to our mental health,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “The issues we’re addressing now didn’t start when COVID-19 hit our city, and they aren’t going to end with it either. We will continue to work with our city’s advocates, experts, patients and communities to enhance mental healthcare in Chicago and give our residents and families the support many so desperately need.”

CDPH will be partnering with four leading community mental health organizations and providing \$1.2 million in funding to expand access for persons living with serious mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or co-occurring disorders. The four organizations – Friend Health, Healthcare Alternative Systems, Thresholds, and Trilogy Behavioral Healthcare – are geographically distributed across the city and have deep histories in the communities they serve. They will expand access to Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services and Community Support Teams (CST), with a focus on Chicago’s South and West Sides.

“These teams will provide services to persons who may benefit from a higher level of support and will increase community-based mental health services in communities of highest need across Chicago,” said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D. “This is so important right now because COVID-19 can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities in those with mental health conditions.”



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CDPH is also announcing today the purchase of doxy.me – a HIPAA compliant telemedicine platform – to deliver digital behavioral health services at its mental health centers in Bronzeville, Englewood, West Elsdon, Lawndale, and North River. Telehealth technology is a powerful tool for enhancing low-barrier access to mental health services and will allow CDPH mental health centers to offer psychotherapy, psychiatry, psychosocial groups, and case management services to residents across Chicago. Services will be provided regardless of income, health insurance status, or immigration status.

“Doxy.me is honored to be in a position to help Chicagoans deal with this crisis,” said Brandon Welch, Founder, doxy.me. “We commend the City of Chicago for putting these mental health practices into place quickly and giving residents the ability to see their providers when they are most needed.”

In addition, CDPH will provide technical assistance to partner organizations in an effort to scale their telemedicine capabilities. Organizations serving communities most acutely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be prioritized for these tailored services to align with the work of the City’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Team, which was established to respond to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Brown communities in Chicago.

“A core component of the work we do is to build accessible mental health services for residents of the South Side of Chicago, so I’m thrilled that Mayor Lightfoot and her team recognize that critical need. By getting residents connected to services that address their underlying needs, we are able to prevent them from cycling unnecessarily through first responder and emergency room services, and can help them experience recovery in the communities that they call home,” said Joel Johnson, Executive Vice President at Friend Health and President of the Human Resource Development Institute, a subsidiary of Friend Health. “This is consistent with the race-equity agenda that the mayor and CDPH have been speaking about both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we’re excited to be a part of this innovative partnership.”

Finally, through a partnership with [Ten Percent Happier](#), CDPH is supporting the self-care of all Chicagoans through a newly-launched microsite, ‘[Windy City Wellness](#),’ which includes a curated collection of talks, guided mindfulness activities and sleep supports from a diverse set of wellness experts. Windy City Wellness has tools for all Chicagoans - regardless of age or ability - to engage in their own well-being through relaxation, mindfulness and meditation techniques. Those interested can find Windy City Wellness at <https://www.tenpercent.com/chicago/>.



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“We’re proud to join forces with Mayor Lightfoot and the City of Chicago to provide people with meditative tools for dealing with these deeply taxing and uncertain times,” said Dan Harris, Co-Founder of Ten Percent Happier. “We hope that these experiences—designed for people who are absolute beginners or seasoned pros—will create a sense of community at a time when many of us may feel cut off, and at the very least, provide a useful break in your day.”

These mental health supports build off Mayor Lightfoot’s Framework for Mental Health Equity announced last year. The framework is a roadmap to a better network of mental health services in Chicago to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive system of mental health care.

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