



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Mental Health Month 2023: Celebrating HOPE, Continuing the Work**

Columbia, SC – May is Mental Health Month across the United States. This year, the South Carolina Department of Mental Health seeks to celebrate recent advances South Carolina has made in its efforts to reach out to those in crisis, provide early intervention, and help support the recovery of the one in five people who live with a mental health diagnosis.

### **SC Mobile Crisis Expanding to Include Peer Support**

SCDMH has received a Community Crisis Response Partnership Mobile Crisis Expansion grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that will support hiring and training people with lived experience as peer support specialists in its Mobile Crisis Program. The grant will target ten counties: Aiken, Anderson, Chesterfield, Greenwood, Newberry, Laurens, Abbeville, McCormick, Edgefield, and Saluda; SCDMH selected the first three counties because they have the highest suicide rates in our state and the remainder based on a variety of health and socioeconomic disparities. Peer support specialists will provide daytime and evening coverage as co-responders alongside mobile crisis staff. Mobile Crisis Peers will respond on the scene with a clinician and conduct follow-ups with individuals who have had contact with Mobile Crisis. SC Mobile Crisis is available 24/7 in all 46 counties – call (833) 364-2274.

### **New Crisis Call Center to Open This Summer**

When the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline transitioned to 988 in July of 2022, South Carolina only had one center to answer calls from within the state. As a result, calls that cannot be answered by the existing call center in Greenville are transferred to and answered by out-of-state centers. SCDMH is opening a second call center this summer in Charleston to expand call capacity. The additional center, the staff of which are already undergoing training, will help move South Carolina toward its goal of answering every single call, chat, and text from people in South Carolina who reach out to 988.

### **Free Online Screener Successful; New Tool for Youth to Launch in Fall**

South Carolina is the only state in the US with a free, online, anonymous, [universal mental health screener](#) for people 18 and older that is reviewed and responded to in real-time by trained staff. Since SCDMH launched this tool in 2021, 2,697 people have completed the screener and been connected to or provided information for care available to them. Most people who finished the screener were not involved in mental health treatment at the time of taking it.

Building on this success, SCDMH is preparing to introduce a companion mental health screener this fall that parents and guardians can take on behalf of or alongside their children. Like the adult screener, staff will review the questionnaire and converse with them in real-time to assist them in connecting to the resources they need.

### **Suicide Prevention Training & Awareness Continue**

Since its inception in 2015, the SCDMH Office of Suicide Prevention has trained 47,739 people in prevention, postvention, or intervention strategies. In fact, the Office estimates it has reached 6.38 million people with its training, community initiatives, and public awareness campaigns. “If we look at the most recent statistics, nationally, the suicide rate in the US increased in 2021, but in South Carolina, it decreased,” said SCDMH Emergency Services Program Director Jennifer Butler. “The data show our efforts are saving lives, that we have many reasons to HOPE. Still, we know we still have work to do – one life lost to suicide is one too many.”

“We continue to make progress in South Carolina in meeting people where they are,” said SCDMH Interim State Director Robert Bank, MD. “That might mean help from a clinician and a peer who’s been there themselves at a home if someone is in crisis; it might mean receiving support via the listening ear of a clinician located at a call center; it might be receiving resources in the area and guidance from a staffer through your computer; or even going for a regular visit with a professional at your local mental health center. Our goal is to meet South Carolinians where they are – both physically AND in their recovery.”

The [SCDMH’s](#) mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses. The Department provides clinical services to approximately 100,000 patients each year, about 30,000 of whom are children. As South Carolina’s public mental health system, SCDMH provides outpatient mental health care through a network of 16 community mental health centers and associated clinics serving all 46 counties and inpatient psychiatric treatment in three state hospitals. In addition to mental health services, SCDMH provides nursing care to eligible veterans through a network of state veterans nursing homes.

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