



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**MAYOR LONDON BREED APPOINTS DR. ANTON NIGUSSE
BLAND TO SERVE AS DIRECTOR OF MENTAL HEALTH
REFORM**

Dr. Nigusse Bland, who currently serves as the Medical Director for Psychiatric Emergency Services at Zuckerberg San Francisco General, will be responsible for developing a strategy for improving San Francisco's approach to mental health and substance use treatment for homeless clients most at-risk

San Francisco, CA – Mayor London N. Breed today appointed Dr. Anton Nigusse Bland to serve as Director of Mental Health Reform. In this new role created by Mayor Breed, Dr. Nigusse Bland will be responsible for reviewing how San Francisco provides mental health and substance use services to homeless individuals, and making recommendations on how to reform the system.

Mayor Breed announced the creation of this new position during her State of the City Address. Dr. Nigusse Bland is a UCSF psychiatrist who currently serves as the Medical Director for Psychiatric Emergency Services (PES) at Zuckerberg San Francisco General. In his new position, he will report to Dr. Grant Colfax, San Francisco's Director of Health.

"I am proud to appoint Dr. Anton Nigusse Bland to serve as San Francisco's Director of Mental Health Reform. It is no secret we face serious challenges around mental health in our city, and while I am committed to expanding our mental health and substance use stabilization beds, we must also make sure that we are utilizing our resources effectively and not letting people fall through the cracks," said Mayor Breed. "Dr. Nigusse Bland will bring his extensive history working in San Francisco's mental health system to help us reform and improve our approach to getting people the help they need."

Dr. Nigusse Bland's responsibilities as Director of Mental Health Reform will include reviewing San Francisco's approach to mental health care and making recommendations for reforms. This includes strengthening programs that are proving effective, identifying wasteful programs that are ineffective, and finding solutions to gaps in the current continuum of mental health care services. He will work with community providers to develop strategies to better coordinate services across the City, with an emphasis on programs that lower barriers to care for homeless clients.

"From my vantage point at Psychiatric Emergency Services, I have seen people in crisis who are disconnected from care and resources in the community," said Dr. Nigusse Bland. "I look forward to working with community providers to develop a strategic approach to mental health



and substance use services for people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco. While the system works well most of the time, I will be focusing on the gaps that leave some of our highly vulnerable residents at risk. What can we do to bend in their direction?"

Since taking office, Mayor Breed has taken a number of steps to strengthen San Francisco's approach to behavioral health, which includes both mental health and substance use services. She is pushing to add 100 additional stabilization beds this year and to implement Senate Bill 1045, which would strengthen San Francisco's conservatorship laws. Additionally, she recently announced that San Francisco received a grant of \$3 million to expand the Department of Public Health's outreach and treatment efforts to help homeless people suffering from mental health and substance use issues.

"San Francisco has a robust system of mental health and substance use treatment that serves tens of thousands of people each year," said Dr. Grant Colfax, San Francisco Director of Health. "The new Director of Mental Health Reform will help us zero in on how our system serves people experiencing homelessness, and where we can improve, thereby lowering barriers to care for recovery and wellness."

In his current role, Dr. Nigusse Bland is deeply involved with San Francisco's mental health system. PES is the primary provider of adult emergency mental health care in San Francisco. They serve approximately 8,000 patients per year, of whom approximately 40% are voluntary walk-in patients. PES provides crisis stabilization, complete medical and psychiatric assessment and evaluation services, and initial treatment, if appropriate. The staff, which includes psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, nurses, and social workers, collaborates closely with a number of community agencies to develop short- and long-term treatment plans.

"Through his leadership at PES, Dr. Nigusse Bland fully understands the mental health challenges the City faces and has the experience necessary to drive change that will make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable patients," said Dr. Matthew State, Chair, UCSF Department of Psychiatry.

Dr. Niguisse Bland is a board-certified psychiatrist and addiction psychiatrist. He is stepping away as Medical Director of Psychiatric Emergency Services at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital to assume the new role.

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