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For Immediate Release

San Francisco Warm Line Provides Free On-Demand Mental Health Support Peer Counselors Add Value, Make Seeking Help More Accessible

SAN FRANCISCO (August 28, 2014) -- San Francisco has taken a major step toward filling a gap in the mental health system that is expected to help thousands of people before they reach a crisis point.

The City's new telephone Mental Health Triage Warm Line will offer peer counselors 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to people who need someone to talk to right now.

The Warm Line, a project of the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH), is funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the state Mental Health Services Act that supports programs to reduce hospitalizations due to mental illness. The Warm Line is operated by the non-profit Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHASF), under a SFDPH contract. It augments the City's existing mental health telephone services, which include a 24-hour Suicide Prevention Hotline and an Access Helpline for referrals to mental health services.

"We are so happy to offer this new service to all San Franciscans," said Jo Robinson, SFDPH Director of Behavioral Health. "It is essential to find more ways to address the needs of adults, parents and youth who are experiencing mental health crises but who are not actively contemplating suicide. I believe that having peers answer the Warm Line is an added value."

The Warm Line represents a new way to deliver care. It is staffed by highly-trained peer counselors, with lived experience of mental health conditions and recovery, many of whom could have been callers in the past. They offer empathy, compassion and advice. This creates camaraderie and a healing atmosphere that helps callers to feel supported, less isolated and free from shame. Counselors also can make referrals to mental health professionals and help callers connect to other resources in the

The mission of the San Francisco Department of Public Health is to protect and promote the health of all San Franciscans.

We shall ~ Assess and research the health of the community ~ Develop and enforce health policy ~ Prevent disease and injury ~
~ Educate the public and train health care providers ~ Provide quality, comprehensive, culturally-proficient health services ~ Ensure equal access to all ~

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community. With caller's permission, Warm Line counselors also can provide tailored follow-up services.

The Warm Line is consistent with the recommendation of the CARE Task Force to increase the use and reach of peer specialists in engagement and treatment. The CARE Task Force was convened by SFPD at the request of Mayor Lee to determine how to better serve individuals with serious mental illness.

"It's an easier first call to make for some, or to connect through online chat from our website," said Eduardo Vega, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association. "When somebody understands the kind of thing you may be going through, they can help bridge the gap, foster hope and ease people into services, if that's what they need. They can then talk through what it's like to receive services, from personal experience, if the caller is nervous."

The Warm Line plans to serve 20,000 people in the first four years of operation. Callers will be able to talk for as long as they like, as often as they like, though calls are often 20 minutes or less. There will also be an online chat version available on the MHASF website at <http://www.mentalhealthsf.org/>. The suicide hotline handles 70,000 calls per year and imposes time limits on those who call frequently. This new service should provide a better option for those who are not suicidal but still in need of support.

The Warm Line had a soft opening this month, and is currently taking calls from noon to 8pm, Monday to Friday. It will be expanding to around-the-clock coverage with multiple languages including Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog and Russian by January 1 2015.

Mental Health Triage Warm Line: 1-855-845-7415
Warm Line chat online: <http://www.mentalhealthsf.org/>
Suicide Prevention Hotline: 415 781-0500
Mental Health Access Helpline: 415 255-3737