



**Special Communication to City of Burlington  
Emergency Operations Center and Mayor  
Regarding COVID-19**

**To:** Brian Lowe, Luke McGowan

**From:** Barbara Shatara of City Analytics Team

**RE:** COVID-19 Mental Health Helplines & Other Resources

**Date:** April 1, 2020, 8:30pm

*Updated:*

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**Key Messages:**

- Governor Cuomo's launched the Emotional Health Line, an initiative to provide free mental health services for New Yorkers during the COVID19 crisis. Within a week of the request for volunteer mental health care providers, the helpline was up and running.
- Gov. Cuomo stated, "This is also very exciting. I don't know that anyone else has done this. We've talked about the emotional stress that this brings on people. And the mental health stress, and mental health challenges. No one's really talking about this. You know, we're all concerned about the immediate critical need. The life and death of the immediate situation, which is right. But don't underestimate the emotional trauma that people are feeling, and the emotional health issues."
- Initially aimed at New Yorkers, people from outside the state have taken advantage of the well-received service indicating a broad need for mental health counseling at this time. This program is a model for the country. Other states, including Oklahoma and Texas, have also established COVID-19 specific mental health services.
- The Vermont Department of Health and NAMI-Vermont have compiled COVID-19 specific mental health resources on their websites. Some populations may require counseling unique to their needs such as the LGBTQ community and those who do not speak English fluently.
- Burlington Telecom's Nicholas Martin is familiar with setting up helplines.

**Key Resources**

- New York State's [Emotional Support Line](#) and [Get Involved](#) Initiative
- NY Dept of Health Get Involved [Survey](#) for Health Professionals
- Vermont's [Coping with COVID-19 Stress](#)
- Center for Medicare Education's Issue Brief: [Setting Up a HotLine](#)

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## Summary of Free COVID19-Related Mental Health Programs and How They are Implemented

### New York: Emotional Support Line

On March 25, 2020, New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo reported that 6,000 mental health professionals had responded to his call for clinicians to voluntarily provide online mental health services. An announcement of need and letters requesting volunteers went out to clinicians from the Governor and New York Department of Health Commissioner Howard Zucker the previous week. New York's [Office of Mental Health](#) oversaw the creation and implementation of the Support Line. The launch of the Support Line was marketed extensively through news media, NY.gov, social media and the websites of psychiatric hospitals. [Time magazine](#) mentioned a plan for a Mental Health Electronic Help Center, but so far have found no further mention of this. I have called and emailed the New York Department of Health's Public Information office to get more information about the logistics of setting up the helpline, but I haven't heard back from anyone.

New Yorkers can call the COVID-19 [Emotional Support Line](#) at 1-844-863-9314 for free mental health counseling.

- Calls made to the hotline allow an individual to schedule a free online chat or video appointment with a mental health professional. The hotline is staffed 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week.
- The Help Line is staffed by volunteers recruited through the Get Involved initiative, including mental health professionals, who have received training in crisis counseling.
- The initial focus for the Emotional Support Line was New York State residents, but they are currently receiving calls from outside the state.

### New York's [Get Involved](#) Initiative for Qualified Health Professionals

- Health care professionals were directed to the Health and Related Professionals [survey](#) which collects their contact information, licensure information, experience and area of expertise.
- Survey submissions were reviewed by a "healthcare staffing professional" at New York's Department of Health and may have been followed by an additional phone survey. There has been some lag in contacting interested people due to the overwhelming response.
- The Office of Mental Health has also posted a list of links to help guide health care professionals to the most current and recommended sources of COVID-19 information.  
<https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/guidance/>

### Oklahoma: Copes COVID-19 Emotional Support Line

Family & Children's Services, Oklahoma's largest community mental health center offers a 24/7 telephone help through their [Community Outreach Psychiatric Emergency Services \(COPES\) Team](#) for those needing emotional support during the pandemic.

The Mental Health Association of Oklahoma has created a [virtual support group line](#). The support groups are led by mental health professionals. Instructions from their website:

- New members can sign up through the Mental Health Assistance Center 918-585-1213 or 405-943-3700 or <https://mhaok.org/mental-health-assistance-center>

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- Interested persons need to indicate in the call or form that they would like to join a support group and which support group they wish to attend. If they are unsure, our coordinator can help them to determine the best fit for them.
- Our Coordinator will then forward contact information to the appropriate support group leader.
- The support group leader will then reach out to the new members to connect them to the group meeting.
- Support group leaders will need both a phone number to talk with the potential member initially and an email to invite them to the meeting.

#### Texas: Statewide Mental Health Support Line

Texas Health and Human Services has launched a 24/7 [statewide mental health support line](#) to help Texans experiencing anxiety, stress or emotional challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This new resource offers COVID-19-related mental health support. People can call the Statewide COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free at 833-986-1919. [Press release](#)

#### **Mental Health Resources Available in Vermont**

- Vermont Department of Health:
  - [Coping with COVID-19 Stress](#) is a list of tips, contact information and links to help manage stress during the pandemic
- National Alliance on Mental Illness-Vermont:
  - offers a weekly Wellness Check-in on Mondays @ 12:00pm. Join on video by Zoom or by teleconference. <http://namivt.org/>
  - also offer a [COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide](#)
- Vermont Public Radio's [Vermont Edition](#):
  - Hosted a conversation with Laurie Emerson, Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont and Dr. Andrew Rosenfeld, a child psychiatrist and assistant professor at the Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont.
- LGBTQ+ Specific Resources
  - Pride Center:
    - [SafeSpace](#) program is available for those fleeing or experiencing violence (sexual, domestic, family, emotional, physical, mental, discrimination, hate) via their phone line 802-863-0003 10-6 M-Th and 10-2 F.
    - The education team is working on developing webinars and trainings for these times, and our staff is available over the phone (802-860-7812, and it'll transfer to each of us).
    - Their [social programming](#) is continuing as usual and can be found on the linked calendar.
  - [Outright VT](#):
    - Does not provide direct counseling, but keeps a list of LGBTQ-affirming providers that youth can contact (found on their [website](#)).

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- They are offering all of their (free) social and support programs virtually via zoom at this time, including the weekly youth Friday Night Group (6:30pm), drop in space, and parent/caregiver groups (first and second Monday of each month, 6:30pm).
- They are working remote, so youth can call, email, follow social media, with any questions, concerns, etc at [Info@outrightvt.org](mailto:Info@outrightvt.org) or 802.865.9677
- Operate a free and confidential text line, so youth can reach out that way with any questions or concerns about sexuality, gender, relationships, etc. And get a medically accurate response within 24 hours. That number is 724.888.7277

## Information on Creating Health Lines

### Burlington Telecom

Burlington Telecom can set up a medical helpline. The VOIP line can handle large call queues and route calls to individual cell phones. Medical personnel could reside anywhere in the State. Callers would not get a busy signal, the call would be routed to a clinician or to leave a message.

Contacts for Burlington Telecom:

- **Nicholas Martin**, Business Development Manager, Commercial Sales Department  
[nmartin@burlingtontelecom.com](mailto:nmartin@burlingtontelecom.com)
- **Beau Tetreault**, VoIP Technician, Burlington Telecom, [btetreault@burlingtontelecom.com](mailto:btetreault@burlingtontelecom.com)
- **Burlington Telecom** 802.540.0968 phone, 802.540.0967 fax, [www.burlingtontelecom.com](http://www.burlingtontelecom.com)

### Setting Up a Hot Line from the Center for Medicare Education

Implementation and management of hotlines can be complex. [This issue brief](#) from the Center for Medicare Education discusses some of the issues, including costs, that go into developing and maintaining a consumer assistance hotline.

[Helplines Partnerships](#) also offers a guide to helpline set up.

## Other Free Mental Health Programs Not Specific to COVID-19

- [NYC Well](#) is a free, confidential mental health support. Clients can speak to a counselor via phone, text, or chat and get access to mental health and substance use services, in more than 200 languages, 24/7/365. NYC Well also has an [App Library](#) to help manage health and emotional wellbeing.
- [Mental Health Minnesota](#) offers two helplines and a crisis line. There is [online information](#) on COVID-19 mental health support but no dedicated helpline is set up.
  - The **Mental Health Line** provides information about mental health programs and services. Mental Health Line staff include referrals, determination of next steps, and connect patients to services in communities across the state. Hours for the Mental Health Helpline are 9am-5pm Mon-Fri

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- **Minnesota Warmline** provides a peer-to-peer approach to mental health recovery, support and wellness. Professionally trained Certified Peer Specialists have first-hand experience living with a mental health condition. The Warmline is available from 5pm-10pm, Mon-Sat.
- The **Crisis Line** is available 24/7.
- [The National Alliance on Mental Health Minnesota Chapter has a webpage with information on Internet access for low-income households.](#)
- The National Alliance on Mental Health Minnesota, led by psychiatrist and author Dr. Henry Emmons, is responding to the Covid-19 crisis by offering a free program called [“Calm In The Time of Coronavirus: An Online Resilience Retreat.”](#)
- **Nationwide Resources**
  - Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, [SAMHSA](#), has a national helpline that is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365 treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.
  - National Institute of Mental Health, [NIMH](#), has a robust website of mental health information.
  - National Alliance on Mental Health, [NAMI](#)
- **Industry Specific Support Groups:**
  - [Ben’s Friends](#) is a food and beverage industry support group with weekly online meetings
  - [Chefs with Issues](#) is another food and beverage industry support group
  - [The Lovett Center](#) in Houston offers complimentary clinician-led virtual support groups specifically for food and beverage industry members through April 30. Participation is limited to 10 people per group, and sessions will take place on Mondays at 2:30 p.m. and Thursdays at 4:00 p.m. CDT, and attendees must register online.

## **Mental Health Recommendations**

- [CDC Stress and Coping](#)

From [Article from Partners in Health News](#)

- **10 Mental Health Tips for Coronavirus Social Distancing**
  - Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing. Use technology to connect widely
  - Set clear routines and schedules, seven days a week, at home, but don’t go overboard
  - Exercise and physical activity, daily if possible.
  - Learning and intellectual engagement—books, reading, limited internet
  - Positive family time—working to counter negativity
  - Alone time, outside if possible, but inside too; but remember, don’t isolate
  - Focused meditation and relaxation
  - Remember the things that you really enjoy doing that you can do in this situation, and find a way to do them
  - Limit exposure to TV and internet news; choose small windows and then find ways to cleanse yourself of Bathe daily, if possible, to reinforce the feeling of cleanliness

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- Six things to remember
  - Things will get better eventually, and back to normal; the world is not collapsing (don't go "catastrophic")
  - Most people are good, and people are going to persevere and help each other
  - You're tough, you've overcome challenges before; this is a new one
  - This is a particularly strange and unprecedented situation; humor helps once in a while
  - If having obsessive or compulsive thoughts related to the virus, or the broader uncertainty, wash your hands once, and then remind yourself that anxiety is normal in this scenario. But the mind also can also play tricks on us. Try to breathe and move the internal discussion on.
  - Live in the moment, think about today, less about the next three days, even less about next week; limit thinking about the next few months or years, for now.

### Articles on Mental Health Issues Related to COVID-19

- WHO:
  - [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak 18 March 2020](#)
- CHINA:
  - [Patients with Mental Health Disorders in the COVID 19 Epidemic](#)
  - A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19 epidemic: [implications and policy recommendations](#)
  - [Mental health services for older adults in China during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
  - [Online mental health services in China during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [Vicarious traumatization in the general public, members, and non-members of medical teams aiding in COVID-19 control](#)
- IRAN:
  - [Iranian Mental Health During COVID-19 Crisis](#)

### Other Sources & Resources

- [MA Responds](#) Massachusetts Health Professional Volunteer for COVID-19 Relief
- [Up-To-Date](#) is a tool for clinicians to get the most current medical literature. They are offering free guest passes during COVID-19 for clinicians who are not members.
- [Vermont Business Magazine: New law to fast track qualified healthcare professionals during COVID-19 state of emergency 03/31/2020 - 2:05pm](#)
- [AmWell webinar - COVID-19: Leveraging Telehealth to Address the Psychological Impact of the Pandemic](#)
- [Immigrants Rising Virtual Wellness Gatherings](#)
- [Online Help To Stay Sober During a Pandemic from the New York Times](#)
- [The Food & Wine Pro Guide to Mental Health and Sobriety Resources](#)

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