



COUNTY OF YOLO

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Yolo County Proclaims May as Mental Health Awareness Month Promoting Awareness, Recognition and Intervention

(Woodland, CA) – The Yolo County Board of Supervisors will approve a resolution proclaiming May 2022 as Mental Health Awareness Month at its meeting on May 24. Promoting awareness, recognition, and intervention of mental illness proves critical. To meet the mental health needs in our community, the Yolo County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA) has taken a collaborative approach and prioritized program development to reach underserved populations.

One program has gained recognition. The National Association of Counties acknowledged Yolo County as a Stepping Up Innovator County for expertise in using data to drive decisions and better outcomes on the number of incarcerated people who have serious mental illnesses. These efforts now ensure nearly 6,000 bookings into jail are screened for mental illnesses every year.

“We are incredibly grateful to our Board of Supervisors, who in 2015 recognized the need to focus on mental health, substance use, and our criminal justice system by passing a resolution to make Yolo County a Stepping Up County. We are even more excited that on May 24, through a new resolution, our Board will be formally accepting the NACo Stepping Up Innovator County designation making Yolo County one of only five counties throughout California to receive this designation,” said Adult and Aging Branch Director, Ian Evans. “This recognition and the efforts it took to get here would not have been possible without the commitment of the Board, County leadership across multiple departments, and the incredible work that our teams and partners do every single day to improve the lives of those struggling with behavioral health needs who find themselves involved in the criminal justice system.”

Yolo County has used integrated data across justice, behavioral health, and housing systems to better inform program design, evaluation, and resource development with the goal of reducing the 50% baseline rate of people entering the jail with behavioral health needs and staying an average of 16 days, as well as the subset of 25% of bookings with a serious mental illness staying an average of 36 days.

“Mental Health Awareness Month gives us an opportunity to raise awareness of those living in our community with mental health and behavioral health symptoms and to help reduce the stigma that so many experience that can impede access to care. Collaboration is the cornerstone to improving access to mental health services throughout our community. By working together, we can align our efforts, maximize our impact, and realize a

shared vision of ensuring that every resident of Yolo County can get the appropriate services and quality of care they need to support their resiliency, health, and wellness,” said Interim Mental Health Director, Karleen Jakowski.

“The Yolo County Board of Supervisors has made a commitment to improving mental health. We proclaim May as Mental Health Awareness Month to help promote awareness,” said Board Chair, Supervisor Angel Barajas. “We also want to recognize the Yolo County HHSA for their tireless effort and work on mental health programs, which has proved even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation and stress; it has also elevated the importance of mental health in the public eye. This is particularly true in young people where the lack of diagnosis and treatment poses a long-term threat to life, including the risk of suicide.

It takes a community working together to foster an environment where everyone is able to safely seek help and receive mental health support. We recommend that everyone:

- Be compassionate. You don’t know the struggles of others.
- Create and teach awareness. It can be as simple as asking if others are okay.
- Participate in awareness opportunities during the month of May, or create your own ways to raise awareness in your community.

In honor of May as Mental Health month, HHSA staff throughout the County wore green on Friday, May 13, and gathered for a moment of recognition!

Visit the Yolo County Health and Human Services website, www.YoloCounty.org/HHSA, to learn more.

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