



CaIMHSA Program Partner Spotlight: Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services

Founded 70 years ago, Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services was the first freestanding non-profit adult outpatient mental health clinic in Los Angeles County. Today, Didi Hirsch provides mental health services, substance abuse treatment and suicide prevention to more than 70,000 children, adults, older adults and families each year.

In May 2011, CaIMHSA awarded Didi Hirsch grants totaling over \$6.5 million to expand suicide prevention efforts in California. The grants fund two programs: the creation of a statewide suicide prevention network and suicide prevention capacity building in Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, San Diego and Imperial Counties. “Through collaboration and capacity building, we will build suicide prevention-informed communities and save lives,” said Lyn Morris, MFT, and Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center Director. “The CaIMHSA grants help us achieve these critical goals.”

Program 1: California Statewide Suicide Prevention Network

Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center and nine other crisis centers formed the California Suicide Prevention Network (CSPN). The network’s objectives are to achieve a suicide prevention-informed California through regular regional task force meetings, and the development and/or identification of “best practices” in suicide prevention. In addition, crisis centers are working to improve data collection efforts.

“So many Californians need help and don’t know where to turn. Approximately 16,000 Californians make suicide attempts that require hospital care every year.”

Didi Hirsch President/CEO Dr. Kita Curry.

Regional task forces are meeting around the state to coordinate local suicide prevention efforts and develop concrete steps to reduce the risk of suicide locally. To find a local task force, contact Lyn Morris LMorris@didihirsch.org or (310) 895-2305. The network is conducting a needs assessment to identify high-risk populations and priorities for developing best practices in each region.

Best practices work groups will begin meeting in January 2013 with the ultimate goal of developing and/or identifying best practices for submission to the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) Best Practices Registry by January 2014.



The CSPN is also working to coordinate and improve crisis center data collection efforts. With consultation from RAND, a non-profit research institution, and input from 11 California crisis lines, a common set of metrics and a data collection training manual are in development. The metrics include: demographics, reason for call, risk, call volume, follow up and caller satisfaction. By improving data collection, crisis centers can better identify unmet needs and work to improve crisis line services.

Program 2: Local Suicide Prevention Capacity Building

Didi Hirsch is expanding suicide prevention efforts in the following counties: Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, San Diego and Imperial. The efforts include increasing language capacity, collaboration and training, and establishing warmlines to alleviate the number of calls to the crisis lines. Through these efforts, Didi Hirsch has significantly increased call volume in previously underserved regions. Dr. Kita Curry, Didi Hirsch President/CEO and longtime mental health advocate, reported in June, “Calls to the Suicide Prevention Hotline have tripled since 2007. And with so many people faced with employment issues that affect their health coverage, community resources are very much needed right now.”

Warmlines are an important component of suicide prevention. Staffed by people in recovery themselves, the lines provide non-urgent support to callers. They are an effective way to ease the burden on crisis lines while reaching individuals early. As part of this effort, Didi Hirsch has established a warmline consortium consisting of five California warmlines. Through the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health’s ACCESS Center, overnight coverage (from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.) is provided to three Los Angeles area warmlines and NAMI-Orange County’s warmline will soon operate until 3 a.m. instead of 11 p.m.

Didi Hirsch is expanding efforts to reach diverse communities. “Southern California's Vietnamese and Korean Americans are considered to be at high risk of suicide, yet the community lacks adequate resources to help them,” said Lyn Morris, MFT, and Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center Director. To address this need, Didi Hirsch has recently trained crisis counselors fluent in Vietnamese and Korean and conducted a public awareness campaign. English and Spanish-speaking counselors are already on staff.

Expanding suicide prevention efforts to reach underserved communities requires the combined knowledge and resources of California’s top suicide prevention experts. Through collaboration with crisis centers and counties, Didi Hirsch is identifying best practices in suicide prevention, improving crisis center data collection, and expanding the availability of crisis and warmlines. Stay tuned as their work progresses, driving us closer to our goals of reducing suicides and becoming a suicide prevention-informed California.