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FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY LAUNCHES MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS WITH NYC DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING

NEW YORK—First Lady Chirlane McCray, Deputy Mayor Richard Buery and Department for the Aging Commissioner Donna Corrado today launched ThriveNYC’s Geriatric Mental Health Initiative, a package of mental health services that will be offered at 15 senior centers this year and at an additional ten centers in 2017. Mental health clinicians will provide on-site therapy, as well as educational workshops, mental health screening, referrals, and engagement activities that help de-stigmatize mental illness. Through ThriveNYC, the Department for the Aging will also launch friendly visiting to homebound seniors to help prevent social isolation, which increases the risk of chronic health conditions, depression, anxiety and other serious health issues.

First Lady Chirlane McCray, who spearheads the City’s mental health and substance misuse efforts, said, “My own parents suffered from untreated mental health problems that prevented them from fully enjoying the success they earned through many years of hard work. Stigma and lack of resources kept mental health in the shadows and kept my parents from seeking out support that could have improved their lives. For too long, seniors have suffered from mental illnesses with shame and few options to help them get well. But we’re changing that. People get stronger and stigma weakens with every open and honest conversation, and we are creating more resources to make sure those conversations continue. Through the ThriveNYC Geriatric Mental Health Initiative, we’re putting clinicians at dozens of senior centers across the city and launching home visits to decrease social isolation. The lived experience, wisdom and work of our elders are an important resource for our city. We’re proud to have another tool to support them.”

Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery said, “ThriveNYC is a comprehensive plan to strengthen New York City’s mental health system for everyone. That includes thinking about mental health and wellbeing at every stage of life – from early childhood to the senior years. The Department for the Aging’s Geriatric Mental Health and friendly visiting initiatives are directed toward the unique needs of NYC seniors – a segment of our population that is most vulnerable to the impacts of untreated and undertreated mental health challenges. New Yorkers are living longer, and they are choosing to stay in the city. Our job is to make sure they can thrive as they do so.”

Department for the Aging Commissioner Donna Corrado said, “The further away older adults need to go to obtain mental health services, the less likely they are to follow through and use services. Research has shown that integrating mental health services into non-traditional settings improves services access, receipt of services and positive outcomes. Our Geriatric Mental Health Initiative follows this model by embedding mental health professionals in our centers. The embedded practitioners will become familiar faces seniors can trust. We are also so pleased to be able to offer friendly visiting through our case management agencies to homebound older adults at risk of social isolation.”

Prevalence estimates suggest that 20 to 22 percent of older adults meet criteria for a mental disorder nationally. Within New York State, the number is expected to increase by 56 percent, from 495,000 persons in 2000 to 772,000 by 2030, as the number of older adults in the general population increases. Many older adults are not diagnosed, are misdiagnosed, or do not seek treatment. Some older adults may have histories of psychological disorders, while others may develop new problems related to aging.

By stationing clinicians on site, the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative makes treatment more accessible and thus helps to overcome a major barrier. The mental health clinicians will also actively engage seniors in informal activities that help raise awareness about mental wellbeing and to de-stigmatize mental health treatment

The Department for the Aging is partnering on this initiative with four community-based providers of mental health services – CAPE at the Samuel Field Y, JASA, SPOP and Weill Cornell Medical Center. Each program will station one or more of their clinicians at assigned centers. JASA will be working with centers in the Bronx; SPOP with centers in Manhattan; CAPE with centers in Queens; and Weill Cornell with centers in Brooklyn and Staten Island.

As part of the ThriveNYC program, the City is also launching an initiative with the Department for the Aging to offer friendly visiting service to elders who live alone and are at risk of social isolation. Social isolation – the absence of a supportive network of family and friends and of opportunities to be connected and engaged – puts those who experience it at risk of higher rates of chronic health conditions, depression, anxiety, institutionalization and even death. In the past, this important preventive measure was not provided on a large scale by DFTA-funded programs, mainly due to a lack of resources. The service will now be available to many more vulnerable seniors through DFTA’s case management agencies.

The service will be provided through trained volunteers working with coordinators at the case management agencies. The volunteers will seek to develop meaningful relationships with the individuals they visit and to engage them in activities like shopping, library visits, and local senior center visits. To enrich the service, volunteers and friendly visiting coordinators will be trained on mental health first-aid because social isolation can put seniors at risk for mental health problems. An important purpose of the visiting service will be to link clients identified by their visitors as needing mental health intervention to appropriate resources.

"As Chair of the City Council's Committee on Aging, I see the need for mental health support amongst our senior population almost every day. This important effort to provide more health

resources and to destigmatize mental health issues will literally save lives and increase elder adults' quality of life, their sense of well-being, and their connections with each other and their neighborhoods. I thank Mayor de Blasio, the First Lady, and Commissioner Corrado for their commitment to the health and well-being of seniors and all New Yorkers," said **Council Member Margaret Chin, Chair of the Committee on Aging.**

"I commend the First Lady, Deputy Mayor, and Department for the Aging for their success on the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative. The New York City Council has always had a strong commitment to assisting seniors whose mental health needs can often be hard to reach through traditional treatment models and the ThriveNYC initiative will continue to serve this important population. I am glad to see that the initiative has achieved funding at a level that will allow implementation throughout the city," said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services.**

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