



Joseph I. Giarrusso III
New Orleans City Council
District A



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New Orleans Mental Health Collaborative Receives \$1.9 Million SAMHSA Grant

MHC Steering Committee announced; members will help oversee efforts to expand community mental and behavioral health services

NEW ORLEANS - The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) recently awarded [New Orleans Mental Health Collaborative](#) (MHC) partners, led by [United Way of Southeast Louisiana](#) (UWSELA), more than \$1.9 million over two years to expand and coordinate trauma-informed community behavioral health resources and services for young people.

The funds will support the Resilient, Equitable Systems for Overcoming Loss and Violence Everywhere (RESOLVE) New Orleans Project, which focuses on serving youth and families living in communities of chronic poverty most impacted by collective trauma and community violence.

UWSELA will implement RESOLVE New Orleans in partnership with the [City of New Orleans Mayor's Office of Youth and Families](#) (OYF), the [New Orleans Health Department](#) (NOHD) and community partners.

"Mental health needs are great throughout all segments of our community, and connecting residents to resources is critical. To maximize our ability to serve our citizens, we must coordinate efforts across all providers. Our future well-being depends on a strong foundation of easily accessible care," said **New Orleans Health Department Director Dr. Jennifer Avegno**.

The MHC was [launched in September 2022](#) by [New Orleans City Councilmember Joe Giarrusso](#) in response to the city's ongoing mental and behavioral health crisis. Comprised of health care providers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and businesses, the collaborative works to identify and fill gaps in mental health care in the city.

New Orleans youth - particularly Black youth living in communities of chronic poverty - face a mental health crisis fueled by exposure to pervasive violence, disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impacts of Hurricane Ida. Yet, New Orleans lacks accessible mental health care and equitable coordination of services for these same young people. Eighty-five percent of New Orleans Public Schools reported that over 25% of their students have behavioral health needs, and 62% reported that they do not have resources to meet these needs. ([Safe Schools NOLA](#))

"Through the work of the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, our office has repeatedly heard from young people that their mental health and the lack of resources to ensure their well-being is a critical issue for youth in New Orleans. Ensuring that youth have equitable, barrier-free access to mental health services is an effective, collaborative strategy to build resilience as we work in community to reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)," said **Office of Youth and Families Deputy Director Anamaria Villamarin-Lupin, LCSW**.

RESOLVE New Orleans will focus on four primary goals:

1. Develop and implement a strategic plan for a comprehensive and coordinated trauma-informed behavioral health system led by community stakeholders.
2. Expand trauma-informed behavioral health service capacity to serve high-risk youth and families.
3. Increase the number of people who work with young people and receive training in trauma-informed care interventions and approaches.
4. Expand trained peer supports for youth dealing with community violence and trauma.

A community advisory board - with members representing the project's targeted population and related service providers - will be established to inform and oversee the initiative's activities. This includes a competitive sub-grant process to help fill gaps in service and coordination identified in the project's strategic plan.

The project will also provide funding to the [Children's Bureau of New Orleans](#) (CBNO) to expand community and school-based mental health services and to the [Mental Health First Aid Collective](#) (MHFA Collective) and [Coalition for Compassionate Schools](#) (CCS) to expand trauma-informed training for school staff, health care providers and other community leaders.

"As a treatment provider, Children's Bureau of New Orleans (CBNO) is excited about the opportunity to expand its current embedded care model whereby schools and other youth-serving agencies partner with CBNO to provide evidence-based grief and trauma counseling on site. As a community partner, CBNO is looking forward to working with the Mental Health Collaborative to better understand how it can expand community-based treatment in the most effective and efficient manner as the demand for services continues to outpace the availability," said **CBNO President/CEO Charlotte Cunliffe, PhD, MBA/MPH**.

"CPR for a mental health crisis is not intuitive and must be taught. It is the vision of the MHFA Collective that EVERYONE be trained in mental health first aid. We firmly believe that equipping a community with crisis response skills is the investment needed to advance our overall mental health. To that end, we are extremely grateful for the financial support the MHFA Collective will receive from the recent Mental Health Collaborative Grant Award," said **Dr. Rochelle Head-Dunham, Metropolitan Human Services District Executive & Medical Director**.

"Trauma and other mental health conditions are often understood and responded to at the individual level, however we know that those individual experiences are nested in the context of collective trauma. Our vision of flourishing schools rooted in community can only come to fruition in the context of collaborative efforts toward collective healing. Having served as a blueprint for this collective action, the Coalition for Compassionate Schools is grateful to be a partner in the work of the MH Collaborative," said **the Coalition for Compassionate Schools**.

Recognizing that isolation is common among individuals who have experienced trauma, the grant partners will also work with the Community Advisory Board, CBNO and the [New Orleans Youth Alliance](#) to create a citywide peer support program for young people.

Mental Health Collaborative Announces Steering Committee Co-Chairs, Members
The MHC also announced today members of the collaborative's inaugural steering committee.

Giarrusso and Dr. Head-Dunham will co-chair the committee. Members will work to establish a common vision and provide direction and guidance for the collaborative.

“It is clear New Orleans needs a continuum of care for children, adults and those affected by trauma. The purpose of this collaborative is to work on that continuum and expand care for those in need of mental health interventions. We are grateful for so many mental health professionals for giving their time and talent to this needed endeavor,” said District A City Councilmember Joe Giarrusso.

“The hopes and promises of a successful future for our children requires resolutions to the mental health crisis’ they face every day. Targeted efforts that are equitably centered on the most marginalized will immensely benefit the youth population. The work of the Mental Health Collaborative requires dedicated leadership and consistent, collective action. MHSD, the local vanguard authority in behavioral health, remains postured as a leader in this effort,” said Dr. Rochelle Head-Dunham, MHSD Executive & Medical Director.

MHC steering committee members bring expertise in a range of issues related to mental health and youth, as well as lived experience and representation from underserved communities. Additional steering committee members are in the process of being confirmed and will be posted online at UnitedWaySELA.org/MHC.

- Mary Ambrose, LMSW, United Way of Southeast Louisiana
- Dr. Jennifer Avegno, New Orleans Health Department
- Dr. Darvelle Hutchins, New Orleans Saints & New Orleans Pelicans
- Dr. Julie Kaplow, Trauma & Grief Center at Children’s Hospital
- David Kulick, MPH, The Focus Group
- Ron McClain, LCSW, JD, Institute of Mental Hygiene
- Kristian Mollow, New Orleans East Hospital
- Dr. Myo Thwin Myint, Tulane University School of Medicine, Children’s Hospital New Orleans Behavioral Health, and Crescent Care
- Mayra Pineda, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Louisiana
- Dr. Dense Shervington, MPH, Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies
- Dr. Avis Williams, NOLA Public Schools
- Michael Williamson, United Way of Southeast Louisiana

“While many extraordinary efforts exist to support the mental health of New Orleans’ residents, historically, we’ve lacked the funding and coordination necessary to drive systemic change and ultimately improve the well-being of our young people and adults,” said Michael Williamson, UWSELA President and CEO. “United Way is proud to stand with our partners and collaborative leaders to develop innovative and equitable comprehensive solutions to address the complex needs of our city - creating a brighter, stronger New Orleans for all.”

Avondale Global Gateway/T. Parker Host, under the leadership of Chairman and CEO Adam Anderson, was the first business to step in to financially support the launch of the MHC.

“Mental health, especially in our youth is a critical need in our city. When one of my children had a mental health crisis, even with all of our resources, we ended up in the ER. When Councilmember Giarrusso explained his vision for the program to me, we were immediately on board,” added Anderson.

Learn how to join the collaborative and view a full list of MHC members at UnitedWaySELA.org/MHC.

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New Orleans City Council

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of the New Orleans city government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has the final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish. Streaming video and video archives of the City Council's Regular and Committee meetings can be found on the City Council [website](#).

The City Council is comprised of five districts and Councilmembers-at-large: Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Helena Moreno; Council Vice President and Councilmember-At-Large JP Morrell; District "A" Councilmember Joseph I. Giarrusso, III; District "B" Councilmember Lesli D. Harris; District "C" Councilmember Freddie King III; District "D" Councilmember Eugene J. Green, Jr.; and District "E" Councilmember Oliver M. Thomas, Jr.

About the New Orleans Mental Health Collaborative

The New Orleans Mental Health Collaborative (MHC) was created to identify and fill gaps in mental health care in the city. The initiative was launched during a special City Council session on mental and behavioral health convened by New Orleans City Councilmember Joe Giarrusso on Sept. 15, 2022. The MHC is comprised of healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and businesses committed to addressing the mental and behavioral health crisis for children, youth, and adults in New Orleans. Learn more at UnitedWaySELA.org/MHC.

