

Good morning, honorable members of the Maui County Council, thank you for providing Mental Health Kokua this valuable opportunity to address the critical issues facing our community. In times of adversity, it becomes evident that the mental health services on our island are under strain. The very tragic Lahaina fires have brought to the forefront the urgency of addressing the mental health challenges faced by our community. Today, I wish to share valuable insights into the essential services provided by Mental Health Kokua and emphasize the pressing need for support and recognition of the existing strain on mental health services.

Mental Health Kokua, also known as MHK operates a range of crucial programs dedicated to serving individuals struggling with mental health issues.

MHK's Maui Case Management program currently serves approximately 180 individuals referred through Ohana Behavioral Health and around 25 individuals referred through the Adult Mental Health Division. This program plays a pivotal role in linking individuals to essential mental health services.

We currently have two homeless outreach case managers who work with other providers in our community to identify and link houseless individuals with serious mental illness to needed services. Since the tragic Lahaina fires, they have been doing outreach in Lahaina, at the newly established tent city, and working with Kakoo Maui, through which they have been able to link four individuals to mental health services.

Mental Health Kokua's Psychosocial Rehabilitation Center, also known as PSR is located at the corner of Market and Vineyard, it provides critical services to the houseless community. Operating Monday through Friday from 8 am to 2 pm, the center offers free breakfast and lunch, showers, laundry services, and daily classes such as color therapy, relapse prevention, and anger management.

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Mental Health Kokua

To underscore the immense need for such services, allow me to share statistics from our PSR program from August 1, 2023, through November 30, 2023:

- PSR served 1,812 individuals, with 58 new attendees.
- Among them, 500 identified as female, and 1,315 identified as male, ranging from ages 18 to 78 years old.
- PSR provided 1,123 breakfasts, 1,331 lunches, 266 showers, 117 laundry services, and 163 individuals attended classes.
- Notably, 10 individuals expressed the need to be linked to housing, treatment, and mental health services through our homeless outreach case management.

These figures vividly illustrate the critical role that MHK plays in meeting the diverse needs of our community, particularly during times of heightened challenges.

In response to the Lahaina fires and the increased demand for services, Mental Health Kokua is actively collaborating with various organizations, including Kakoo Maui, Hui NO Ke Ola Pono, Aloha House IOP and outreach, Goodwill, SNAP, free phones, Mana Recovery Center, and Chaplin Ministries of Maui. Together, these entities aim to provide comprehensive services to our community in one centralized location on December 14th, at our psychosocial rehabilitation center, the public is invited.

MHK's community housing program addresses the critical need for structured residential environments for individuals with serious mental illness. With eight group homes totaling 66 beds in the central area, this program is an invaluable resource. Additionally, the seven Safe Haven beds, funded by the County of Maui, offer support for houseless individuals with serious mental illness, facilitating their journey towards recovery and stability.

While MHK is making significant strides, we cannot ignore the systemic challenges that hinder our ability to meet the mental health needs of our

community effectively. Our island, with a population of approximately 166,000, faces a shortage of resources, making it difficult to adequately address the mental health challenges that one in five adults on Maui may experience. Agencies such as ours do their best to service this population but this becomes severely difficult especially for the seriously mentally ill that are in need of a higher level of care than we can provide, as there is no higher level of care for this population on Maui. Our hospital's acute care psychiatric ward has 11 beds for our population, and we no longer have a licensed crisis residential service, also known as (LCRS), where individuals could go to stabilize.

In recent times, our Lahaina community and the broader Maui community have experienced a concerning increase in suicides, casting a shadow over the holiday season. As we approach this festive time, it is crucial to heighten awareness about the unique challenges individuals in our community may face during the holidays. The holiday season can amplify feelings of isolation, grief, and stress, contributing to mental health struggles. It is essential for all of us to recognize the signs of distress, offer support to those in need, and foster an environment where open conversations about mental health are encouraged. By acknowledging the increased vulnerability during this time and promoting mental health awareness, we can collectively work towards creating a compassionate and supportive community, ensuring that no one feels alone in their struggles.

The Lahaina fires have left a lasting mark on our community, potentially giving rise to generational trauma that resonates through families and individuals affected by this tragic event. The trauma experienced during the fires, including the tragic loss of loved ones, homes, displacement, and the upheaval of daily life, may not only impact those who directly faced the crisis but could also be transmitted across generations. Children witnessing the distressing consequences of the fires may carry the emotional and psychological burdens into their adulthood, influencing their coping mechanisms, relationships, and overall well-being. The intergenerational effects of such trauma underscore the

importance of comprehensive support and mental health resources to break the cycle and promote healing within families and the Lahaina community as a whole.

What can we do to improve mental health services in Maui County? We can begin by promoting community awareness towards fostering a holistic approach to well-being, where behavioral health is recognized as being just as crucial as physical health. It's time to dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health issues, encouraging open conversations and understanding. State and County officials play a crucial role in addressing mental health needs by allocating sufficient funding for mental health services, treatment facilities, and community programs. Investing in training programs for mental health professionals and support staff. Support the development of integrated care models that combine mental health services with primary care. Foster collaboration between mental health providers, medical professionals, and social services to address comprehensive well-being. Address homelessness and mental health by providing funding for crisis shelters and long-term housing solutions and implement supportive housing programs that integrate mental health services. Offering incentives such as competitive salaries and benefits, loan forgiveness programs, and professional development opportunities can attract skilled professionals to the field, ensuring that we have the expertise needed to provide quality care. By collectively embracing the importance of mental health, we create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to seek help without fear of judgment. Together, we can build a community that prioritizes mental health, leading to a healthier and more resilient Maui County for all residents.