

Conference Highlights Mental Health Care Progress in Post-Katrina New Orleans

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Improving access to mental health care services is a critical issue in post-Katrina New Orleans where an estimated one in three people have battled symptoms of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder in the almost four years since the storm. REACH NOLA, a nonprofit partnership comprised of local health and social service agencies and academic partners including Tulane University and the RAND Corporation, is bringing together mental health care providers and community organizations from across the region to highlight successful programs that are improving access to mental health care for those most in need.

“Partnerships for Mental Health” is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 27 at Grace Episcopal Church, 3700 Canal St. in New Orleans, and will feature three panels showcasing local community-academic partnerships that are helping adults and children across the city.

“This conference is an opportunity for us to share with community members and partners of Tulane, RAND and REACH NOLA some of the progress that has been made in bringing higher quality and more accessible mental health care to the community in the aftermath of the Katrina and Rita disasters,” says Dr. Benjamin Springgate, REACH NOLA president and co-chair, director of health for the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute, and executive director of Community Health Innovation and Research for Tulane's Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy.

One of the primary panels will discuss the REACH NOLA Mental Health Infrastructure and Training Project, an innovative effort by REACH NOLA, RAND, Tulane, and dozens of area partner agencies. The program offers free training to mental health care providers in targeted therapies for helping people recover faster from ongoing behavioral health issues related to the disaster. For example, the program offers training for therapists in evidence-based care such as cognitive behavioral therapy and problem-solving treatment. It hosts programs on medication management for

physicians treating depression.

“We also provide training for case managers and outreach workers about engaging their clients about the very difficult topic of mental health and helping to bring them into care,” Springgate says.

REACH NOLA is also working to create a network among community service agencies that treat and counsel patients so that they can better screen and track outcomes related to depression and PTSD. The goal is to make sure there is a continuum of care and that patients who need help don't fall through the cracks by bouncing from one clinic or community service agency to the next.

“Partnerships for Mental Health” is a free conference open only to those involved in local community organizations dealing with mental health services. Represented organizations involved in the conference include: The Musician's Clinic, Tulane University Department of Psychiatry, Tulane Community Health Center at Covenant House, St. Anna's Medical Mission, Mercy Family Center, Celebration Hope Center, Harry Thompson Center, Episcopal Community Services, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, The Drop-In Center and others.

For more information, please visit: www.REACHNOLA.org.

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