



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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www.putnamcountyny.gov/health

A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Department Supports Putnam's Mental Health Organizations; *Out of the Darkness Walk Scheduled for October 20*

BREWSTER, NY—More people today, than ever before, understand mental illness is a medical condition. It's also becoming clearer that early treatment is most effective. Unfortunately, stigma and discrimination still exist and often keep people from seeking help. This October, with Mental Illness Awareness Week beginning October 6 and National Depression Screening Day on October 10, Putnam's mental health advocates from the health department, the Mental Health Association and the Suicide Prevention Task Force are joining forces to raise awareness, fight stigma and reduce suicides. Together they are promoting Putnam's Out of the Darkness Walk on October 20. The walk starts at 11:15 a.m. at the Carmel Fire Department. Registration begins at 10 a.m. or online at www.afsp.org/Putnam and more information about the Task Force will be available at the walk.

"The well-being of our citizens is paramount," says County Executive MaryEllen Odell. "We are bound by social, ethical and fiscal responsibility to help those with mental health issues, just as we are when they encounter physical illness. Talking about mental conditions more, and in more compassionate ways, helps reduce stigma and encourages individuals to get the help that they or their family members need. Our county has a 24/7 crisis line." The Putnam County Crisis Intervention hotline number is 845-225-1222. This "hotline" is staffed by professionals who make recommendations to anyone based on the situation. There are also "warmlines" available offering peer support, meaning the phone will be answered by someone with a shared lived experience, and are operated through Putnam's Mental Health Association.

Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD, who practiced as a family medicine doctor for decades before becoming commissioner, agrees. "We need to talk openly about mental illness and mental health and encourage people to seek help," he says, encouraging primary care physicians to check in with their patients and inquire how they are doing mentally not just physically.

Megan Castellano, executive director of Putnam's Mental Health Association, and Marla Behler, coordinator of the Child Advocacy Center, encourage everyone to keep the dialogue going. "Many resources are available in Putnam, we are here to help," Ms. Castellano says. "Statistically speaking, twenty two veterans die by suicide every day here in the United States, more than in combat. Additionally, more firefighters and members of law enforcement die by suicide than in the line of duty. These numbers are truly tragic. Getting the word out that peer support is available has the potential to save lives." The Mental Health Association, in partnership with the law enforcement community, has just launched "FIRST LINE," a new warm line manned by active and retired first responders. FIRST LINE is available to offer peer-to-peer support for members of law enforcement, first responders and their families. It's confidential and anonymous. The FIRST LINE number is 845-745-0088. The Vet2Vet warm line, Veterans

helping other Veterans through peer support, continues at 914-519-8097. More information about the Mental Health Association and multiple services for youth and others is available online at www.mhaputnam.org.

Ms. Behler and Ms. Castellano together chair Putnam's Suicide Prevention Task Force. "Suicide claims an extraordinary number of lives each year. And it is not solely measured in lives lost, but also in the community aftershocks. Despite these challenges, suicide doesn't receive the funding of other causes of death," says Ms. Behler. "We encourage everyone to support our efforts and to come out and walk with us on Sunday, October 20." For more information or to register visit www.afsp.org/Putnam.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at www.putnamcountyny.com; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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