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OC Health Care Agency to Recognize Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in September with “Light Up Hope OC” Campaign

SANTA ANA, CA, (September 13, 2022) – September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and to raise awareness of this important issue, the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) will be lighting up the exterior of the County of Orange Administrative Offices as well as other iconic locations throughout Orange County in teal and purple during the week of September 19.

John Wayne Airport, the Mission in San Juan Capistrano, the Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center (ARTIC), Knott’s Berry Farm, Huntington Beach’s Pier and the Nixon Library are just a few of the locations that will be lit up in teal and purple to symbolize suicide prevention awareness. The campaign of colorful lights is to spark meaningful conversations and to save lives by raising awareness that suicide is preventable.

“Building resilience is important for all ages, but students in particular can be vulnerable,” said Chairman **Doug Chaffee**, Fourth District Supervisor. “Suicide is a leading cause of death among young adults, many of whom feel ill-equipped to navigate the mental health system. Simply dialing ‘9-8-8’ on your phone can immediately connect you with someone who can help. Through this campaign, we want to inspire hope in the community and this campaign serves as a reminder that we need to openly talk about suicide.”

“As we Light Up Hope throughout Orange County, we must not forget our veterans,” said Vice-Chairman **Donald Wagner**, Third District Supervisor. “Suicide rates among veterans

is twice as high than non-veterans and veterans ages 18-34 continue to die by suicide at 1.65 times higher rate than other veteran age groups, overall. Help is out there for our frontline heroes. If you are a veteran or a concerned family member of a veteran, please dial 9-8-8 and press “1” to be immediately connected to a live person qualified to support veterans.”

“Every day, there are family and friends, co-workers and classmates, who suffer in silence,” said Supervisor **Andrew Do**, First District. “For many, it’s too difficult to talk about – let alone ask for help. Depression, feeling down, suicidal thoughts – they can affect everyone. It doesn’t matter what language you speak, how old you are, the job you have, or how much money you earn. It’s important to know that you’re not alone. There are people who can help and can be trusted to keep your conversations confidential. If you are someone who has experienced times of struggle or have recently had feelings of hopelessness, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing or sending a text to 9-8-8 to connect with someone who can help. That number works 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is available in multiple languages.”

“The tragic reality is that we must prioritize removing the barriers of stigma our LGBTQ+ youth and our veterans’ community in Orange County face when they seek support,” said Supervisor **Katrina Foley**, Second District. “When we see disproportionate rates of LGBTQ+ youth and veterans dying from suicide in proportion to the general population, it’s clear we must do more as a society to fix this. As Supervisor, I am spearheading efforts to ensure LGBTQ+ youth know they are accepted and supported and to identify socially isolated veterans within our community, so no one gets left behind. I am committed to encouraging, protecting and empowering our most vulnerable populations so they can access life-saving services our county has to offer in a timely manner.”

“Suicide impacts the senior community particularly hard,” said Supervisor **Lisa A. Bartlett**, Fifth District. “Older adults comprise just 12% of the population but make up 18% of all suicides. Loneliness is one of the top reasons why older adults attempt suicide which reinforces how critical social connections are to good mental health. Keep in touch

with your older loved ones – even if it is via Zoom. Ask them how they are feeling and if you get signs that they are depressed or anxious, or notice they start to give away possessions and put their affairs in order, express your concern, reassure them and – most importantly – get help. Remember, suicide is preventable and by recognizing the signs and acting on them, you might be able to save someone’s life.”

“To spread the message of hope, the Office of Suicide Prevention of the HCA’s Mental Health and Recovery Services Division (MHRS), is coordinating many partner and provider events including a social media campaign with the Los Angeles Angels to raise local and global awareness of suicide prevention and stigma reduction,” said **Dr. Veronica Kelley**, Chief of MHRS. “A calendar of the suicide prevention events, and workshops has been posted on our website at www.LightUpHopeOC.com. I want to emphasize that suicide is preventable and there is hope for those who are struggling. Please reach out and use the tools to help a loved one you may be concerned about.”

Some of the signs that a loved one is considering suicide might be:

- Putting affairs in order/giving away possessions
- Reckless behavior/increasing alcohol or drug use
- Anxiety, agitation, anger, hopelessness, sudden mood changes
- Talking about wanting to die or being a burden to others

Find the words:

- Listen, express concern, reassure
- If it is safe, remove weapons from the home

Reach Out:

- In addition to calling the 9-8-8 lifeline, additional resources are available by visiting www.OCNavigator.org or by calling (855) OC-LINKS.

Visit LightUpHOpeOC.com for a list of lighted landmarks and locations and to learn how you can support the message. To learn more about helping someone who is struggling, visit www.suicideispreventable.org.

If you or someone you know is in need of support with an emotional crisis or thinking about suicide, please contact the **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, available 24/7 at 9-8-8.**

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