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Los Angeles County Addresses the Youth Mental Health Crisis Through a Groundbreaking, School-Based Telehealth Collaboration

The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), in partnership with L.A. Care Health Plan, Health Net, their plan partners, and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, will make mental telehealth services available to over one million K-12 public school students at no cost to families through Hazel Health. L.A. Care Health Plan and Health Net are allocating up to \$24 million over two years to cover the new service.

LOS ANGELES, FEBRUARY 2—The [Los Angeles County Office of Education](#) (LACOE), through a historic partnership with [L.A. Care Health Plan](#), [Health Net](#), and the [L.A. County Department of Mental Health](#) (LACDMH), is poised to offer access to mental health services for L.A. County’s 1.3 million K-12 public school students. The partnership with school-based telehealth company [Hazel Health](#) will use virtual care to deliver mental health support for all students, resulting in shorter wait times to connect with qualified therapists, and enabling earlier intervention.

To help make mental healthcare more accessible for students, all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in the county may opt-in to participate in the Hazel Health virtual mental health program. LEAs, such as Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Compton Unified School District, have already made the decision to leverage this service. L.A. Care Health Plan and Health Net are allocating up to \$24 million to cover the services for all LEAs over two years. Funding is made possible by the [Department of Health Care Services' Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program](#) (SBHIP), authorized by Governor Gavin Newsom.

“This historic partnership will bring much-needed mental health support to our students across the county,” Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Debra Duardo said. “We continue to see the devastating impact the pandemic has had on our children’s mental well-being. This crisis has called us to collective action. As a mental health professional, I am keenly aware that partnerships and collaboration across sectors are necessary to meet our children’s needs. We must remove barriers to access and continue our efforts to destigmatize help-seeking around mental health. We must also recognize that physical and mental health is crucial to teaching and learning. I look forward to continuing this critical work with our partners as we strive to improve educational and life outcomes for all children.”

“With unprecedented levels of trauma and stressors facing our students, the need for timely and effective mental health support has never been greater,” Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho said. “The

groundbreaking solutions in virtual care made possible by our partnership with Los Angeles County will dramatically increase our support capacity, ensuring all students are ready for the world.”

“We are excited about this endeavor and honored to have such trusted partners join us in our efforts to ensure students receive every support possible on their education journey. Providing access to quality, responsive mental health services is not only important for their academic success, it is also our moral imperative,” said Compton Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Darin Brawley.

According to the [2022 California Health Care Almanac](#), 1 in 14 children has an emotional disturbance that limits functioning in family, school, or community activities. And according to the [California Master Plan for Kids’ Public Health](#), over 284,000 youth cope with major depression, and 66 percent of youth with depression do not receive treatment. Alarmingly, suicide rates for kids age 10-18 increased 20 percent between 2019-2020.

“Even before COVID-19, the incidence of adolescent depression, suicidal ideation, and emergency room visits was on the rise, and mental health resources have not kept pace with rising levels of student distress, depression, and traumatic experiences,” said John Baackes, L.A. Care CEO. “L.A. Care saw an opportunity to support the mental health needs of members and students by leveraging telehealth to improve access to prompt evaluation and treatment. We believe this initiative will provide an accessible, expandable, and sustainable model to bring mental health treatment to students across L.A. County.”

"This significant expansion further demonstrates our commitment to the residents of Los Angeles County," said Brian Ternan, President and CEO of Health Net. "Helping more children is why we partner with agencies like the Los Angeles County Office of Education, and local school districts, who dedicate every day to the health and wellbeing of California’s next generation of leaders. These efforts to bring mental health support to youth builds on our previous work with Hazel Health to increase their presence throughout California. This partnership is another large step in the journey to advancing health equity for the state's most vulnerable residents."

Timely care is essential for early intervention and prevention. Hazel’s virtual mental health platform allows California-licensed therapists across the U.S. to support students conveniently in school and at home. The partners are committed to connecting students to therapists who reflect and understand diverse populations. More than 60 percent of Hazel Health therapists identify as people of color, and more than 30 percent are bilingual. This commitment to culturally competent care is unique among service providers and reflects the LEAs’ commitment to equity and inclusion.

"Los Angeles County and its partners are rallying together to respond to the growing needs of our youth and the mental health crisis they face. Now, more than ever, the LACDMH believes that providing timely, comprehensive, and culturally responsive care to our community members requires a multi-pronged approach," said Dr. Lisa H. Wong, Interim Director for LACDMH. "As such, L.A. County has led the efforts to expand services for youth through Hazel Health, providing access to virtual mental health services in partnership with schools. Hazel Health will provide students with less intensive mental health services, allowing LACDMH providers increased capacity to deliver intensive services to our most vulnerable youth."

“Providing access to early intervention services, systematically, at this scale has the potential to change the trajectory for students struggling with mental health across L.A. County,” said Josh Golomb, Chief Executive Officer at Hazel Health. “This model provides more equitable access to care at an unprecedented rate for students from families who may otherwise not benefit from it and can truly change lives.”

The program will deploy in a phased approach for all L.A. County LEAs that choose to opt-in to the program. District leaders can learn about the implementation process and next steps through information sessions hosted by LACOE and Hazel Health in late January and February.

The program with Hazel puts forth a new model of what collaboration between public, private, and community stakeholders makes possible.

About The Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE)

The Los Angeles County Office of Education, based in Downey, is the nation's largest regional education agency, providing a range of services and programs to support the region's 80 school districts and some two million preschool and school-age children. To learn more about LACOE, visit www.lacoe.edu.

About Compton Unified School District

Compton Unified School District, whose Superintendent is Dr. Darin Brawley, is located in the south-central region of Los Angeles County. CUSD encompasses the city of Compton and portions of the cities of Carson and Los Angeles. The district currently serves over 18,000 students at 36 sites. CUSD is a district that is elevating, with a high school graduation rate nearing 90%, dramatic facilities improvements, increasing college acceptance rates and a focus on STEAM throughout all schools. The mission of the Compton Unified School District is to empower leaders to lead, teachers to teach and students to learn by fostering an environment that encourages leaders and teachers to be visionary, innovative and accountable for the achievement of all students. CUSD schools have received numerous awards, including Golden Bell Awards, Blue Ribbon School designations, and Top 10 LA Public Schools by Innovate LA. The District's middle college, Compton Early College High School was recently ranked 32nd in California by U.S. News and World Report, and has had a 100% graduation and 100% college acceptance rate for every graduating senior class since its opening. CUSD is also a member of the League of Innovative Schools. For more information, visit <http://www.compton.k12.ca.us>.

About The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH)

As the nation's largest public mental health department, we ensure access to care and treatment for our most vulnerable residents in a region with more than 10 million people. With an annual budget approaching \$3B and a committed staff of 6,000, LACDMH embodies a "heart-forward" approach to supporting hope, recovery and wellbeing across the County. For more information, visit dmh.lacounty.gov or follow @LACDMH on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

About L.A. Care Health Plan

L.A. Care Health Plan serves more than 2.7 million members in Los Angeles County, making it the largest publicly operated health plan in the country. L.A. Care offers four health coverage plans including [Medi-Cal](#), [L.A. Care Covered™](#), [L.A. Care Medicare Plus](#) and the [PASC-SEIU Homecare Workers Health Care Plan](#), all dedicated to being accountable and responsive to members. As a public entity, L.A. Care's mission is to provide access to quality health care for L.A. County's low-income communities, and to support the safety net required to achieve that purpose. L.A. Care prioritizes quality, access and inclusion, elevating health care for all of L.A. County. For more information, follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Health Net

At Health Net, we believe every person deserves a safety net for their health, regardless of age, income, employment status or current state of health. Founded in California more than 40 years ago, we're dedicated to transforming the health of our community, one person at a time. Today, Health Net's 2,600 employees and 90,000 network providers serve 3 million members. That's nearly 1 in 12 Californians. We provide health plans for individuals, families, businesses of every size and people who qualify for Medi-Cal or Medicare — Coverage for

Every Stage of Life™. Health Net also offers access to substance abuse programs, behavioral health services, employee assistance programs and managed health care products related to prescription drugs. We offer these health plans and services through Health Net, LLC and its subsidiaries: Health Net of California, Inc., Health Net Life Insurance Company and Health Net Community Solutions, Inc. These entities are wholly owned subsidiaries of Centene Corporation (NYSE: CNC), a Fortune 25 company that offers affordable and high-quality products to nearly 1 in 15 individuals across the nation. For more information, visit www.HealthNet.com.

About Hazel Health

Hazel Health is the national leader in school-based telehealth, contracted to provide services to nearly three million students in over a hundred school districts across fourteen states, consistently delivering successful outcomes for access and quality of care. Hazel partners with school districts and more than fifty health plans to provide mental and physical health care services to K-12 students where they are—at school or home. Hazel's diverse, culturally competent providers work with parents and school staff to make the best care decisions for students. Hazel Health's mission is to transform children's access to health care, intervening earlier to help fuel better learning and health outcomes to create thriving communities. www.Hazel.co.