

Time to act collaboratively for county's at-risk kids

by Joe Simitian



I remember the conversation well. I was talking to a constituent, a neighbor, at a community gathering. Out of the blue, she asked me a direct and unexpected question: Why don't we have any hospital beds here in Santa Clara County for teens who are at risk of hurting themselves or others?

Frankly, my first thought was, "That can't be right." But as too many families in our county already knew, and as I would quickly learn, it was entirely right. And it's entirely wrong.

On any given day there are probably two dozen Santa Clara County teens receiving what's known as "acute psychiatric care," requiring a stay in a secured and supervised hospital bed. In our county of 1.9 million residents blessed with world-class health care providers, the number of suitable hospital beds we have for these teenagers in trouble is exactly zero.

Over the course of a year, an estimated 1,462 kids are forced to go elsewhere for the emergency psychiatric help they need. Where do they go? Whenever there's a bed available, which could be San Mateo, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Sonoma or even Sacramento County. In other words: a long way from home.

While the typical hospital stay is "only" six or seven days, these remote locations make a traumatic situation that much harder for both the kids and their families. Sending a child to a hospital that could be hours away makes maintaining a supportive connection daunting at best.

Even those who are lucky enough to find a bed at Mills-Peninsula in Burlingame discover that a trip to this "nearby" facility can be an hour or more each way in rush-hour traffic. But more often than not, given the greater distances involved, such visits are simply impossible. A youngster in need is cut off from the friends, family and mental health providers who know them best.

This is true regardless of economic means. Whether you're uninsured, rely on Medi-Cal, are commercially insured, or paying out of pocket, you could be looking at a round trip of up to 250 miles. For many families, this precludes the kind of access that's critical to mental health recovery.

And on top of the stigma often attached — wrongly — to seeking mental health treatment, parents faced with a difficult decision about hospitalization of their child are even more likely to be deterred from seeking help if it requires sending that child several counties away.

By now you're probably asking yourself the obvious question: Why don't we have space closer to home for kids in need of acute psychiatric care? Regrettably, it's not for lack of demand. Readers of the Weekly know all too well the mental health needs of young people in our community. Nor is it for lack of expertise or commitment. In fact, our area

is fortunate to have an extraordinary number of talented and committed mental health professionals.

So what's the problem? It comes down to medical economics.

None of our local hospitals is in a position to fund the cost of youth inpatient psychiatric facilities and staff without some assurance that the beds will be filled and the costs will be covered. We're faced with the perverse incentives of health care finance; we have to hope we have enough troubled kids to cover the costs of the hospital beds that would serve them.

We do have reason to be optimistic, however. There is a solution.

Prompted by that troubling question from a constituent a year ago, I set out to get some answers. I worked with county staff to assess the nature and extent of the problem. To their credit, the leadership of the county's Behavioral Health Department immediately acknowledged the problem and quickly became convinced that it affected far more families than was commonly understood.

County staff began talking with community members and mental health professionals to consider options. I did the same, beginning conversations with folks I thought could be part of the solution. What I discovered was encouraging.

Leadership at Packard Children's and El Camino hospitals here in the North County acknowledged the problem and expressed a desire to help, though they understandably said they couldn't do it all.

At the county's Health and Hospital System (HHS) and at Kaiser Permanente, the

story was the same: We know there's a need, we want to help, but we can't do it all. And the same from Acadia Healthcare, a Santa Clara County newcomer: Time after time my exhortations were met with the same questions: Will others help as well? And will the county do its part?

I'm convinced the county will do its part. My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors understand the problem, and they're prepared to step up. But it will take the combined time, talent and resources of all of the county's mental health professionals and hospitals to serve these kids here at home where they belong.

The county has recently issued a request for health care providers to weigh in with potential solutions. I urge them to step forward.

If everybody who says they care is really willing to do their part — to cooperate, to collaborate, to work in partnership — we can create a new model that's both medically sound and economically sustainable. It won't take a lot of hospital beds to have a big impact. Even a relative handful of beds has the potential to help hundreds of families every year.

I believe the professions of concern I've heard are real. And I believe it's time we act to give these kids and their families what they need and deserve: a place to turn, at the toughest time in their lives, right here at home in Santa Clara County. ■

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San Jose Mercury News

November 3, 2017

Editorial

Build a 36-bed mental health facility for youth

If you've experienced the anguish of having a child with a serious mental illness, or helped friends or family cope with the challenge, you know there's nothing like the heartbreak and sense of helplessness it can wreak.

And you'll understand why Santa Clara County should build a psychiatric facility for kids so they can be treated close to home — a huge advantage already available to families in counties such as San Mateo, Contra Costa and Alameda where, today, Santa Clara has to send many of its children for psychiatric care.

Forty-six counties in California have no inpatient adolescent psychiatric beds, and the total number of total beds has dropped by 30 percent in the last two decades. In the Bay Area, Alta Bates Medical Center and John Muir Behavioral Center in Contra Costa County, Fremont Hospital and Willow Rock Center in Alameda County, and Mills Health Center in San Mateo County together have about

100 beds for troubled adolescents. Children in their own areas understandably get first priority.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death between the ages of 10-24 — a fact brought home to the Bay Area because of a series of teenage suicides in the Palo Alto area in recent years.

Representing the area, Supervisor Joe Simitian was alarmed to discover in 2014 Santa Clara County parents had to travel to San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa or Sonoma counties, and sometimes as far as Sacramento, to find an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed for their child.

Simitian will propose Tuesday that Santa Clara County create a 36-bed facility on the Valley Medical Center campus. It is a responsibility the county

should be filling.

Shipping vulnerable children hours away from their families and regular health care providers is unhealthy. Kids need family support. Parents under pressure are forced to drive hours to visit their children and watch over their care. For working families, it is a horrific burden.

Santa Clara County recently contracted with San Jose Behavior Health Hospital, a private facility in South San Jose, for 17 beds for children ages 14-17.

But Simitian learned that nearly two dozen Santa Clara County children are being hospitalized outside the county on any given day. And many parents try to address children's problems at home rather than send them so far away for the treatment doctors recommend. It's a terrible dilemma.

With a likely cost of \$40-\$50 million, this project will test the county's ability to manage construction. It has seen massive cost overruns on the still incomplete VMC expansion project. Let's look at this one as a chance to prove that once clear costs have been established, the psychiatric facility can be produced on time and on budget.

Children with mental health issues absolutely can be helped, their lives transformed through medical treatment and expert advice. Santa Clara County children deserve the same access to care as kids in other Bay Area counties. By taking responsibility here, this county can alleviate pressure on facilities in Contra Costa and other areas. The need is acute.

The Mercury News

February 24, 2023

Editorial

Youth mental health facility is much needed

It's one of Santa Clara County parents' worst nightmares. A child develops a mental health problem to such a degree that treatment at a psychiatric hospital becomes necessary.

San Jose Behavioral Health has a limited number of beds for 14- to 17-year-olds. But in a county with an estimated 1,000 or more youth requiring inpatient psychiatric care every year, more — much more — is needed.

The only alternative for parents today is sending children with serious mental health issues to facilities in neighboring areas, including Concord, Vallejo or even Sacramento. Shipping vulnerable children hours away from their families and regular health care providers is counterproductive. Kids need the support of their family and friends. Parents under pressure shouldn't have to drive long distances to visit their children. It's hard enough dealing with a child's mental health issues.

At long last, help is on the way for county youth requiring psychiatric care. After nine years of planning, the county broke ground Wednesday on the 207,000-square-foot Adolescent Psychiatric Facility and Behavioral Health Services Center on the grounds of the county-run Valley Medical Center. The facility, scheduled to be completed in fall 2025, will provide inpatient as well as emergency and outpatient psychiatric services for children, adolescents and adults.

It's difficult to overstate the need. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death between the ages of 10-24. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2021, 29% of students experienced poor mental health, 22% seriously considered attempting suicide, and 10% attempted suicide. Those numbers led the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force to recommend regular anxiety screenings for youth ages 8 to 18 and regular depression screenings

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for adolescents ages 12 to 18.

County Supervisor Joe Simitian, chair of the Board of Supervisors' Health and Hospital Committee, has been the driving force behind the new \$422 million facility. He found it unacceptable in 2014 when he learned a county as wealthy as Santa Clara County had at the time no beds for youth with serious mental health issues. Not at El Camino nor Kaiser hospitals. Nor Lucile Packard and Stanford hospitals.

When completed, the facility will have on the third floor 21 beds for patients ages 13 to 17 and 14 beds for children 12 years and younger. The second floor will have 42 beds for adults. The first floor will include space for emergency psychiatric services, including separate secured ambulance bays for minors and adults, taking pressure off of Valley Medical Center's busy emergency room.

County Executive Jeff Smith expects that revenues generated from caring for patients will pay for the bonds issued to construct the facility.

Research shows treatment for mental illness works. Medical professionals say that three out of every four people with serious mental illnesses can be successfully treated. But they also say that far too many youth with mental illnesses do not receive the services they need. Santa Clara County youth deserve a facility where they can receive help they need to manage their illness, overcome challenges and go on to lead productive lives.



HGA PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
The Adolescent Psychiatric Facility and Behavioral Health Services Center is expected to be completed in the fall of 2025.

Almaden Resident

March 10, 2023

MENTAL HEALTH

Support for youth in crisis

Santa Clara County breaks ground on first inpatient mental health facility for kids and teens.



COURTESY PHOTO

Officials took part Feb. 22 in a ceremonial groundbreaking for the Adolescent Psychiatric Facility and Behavioral Health Services Center linked to Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (VMC). The center will provide the first inpatient hospital beds for kids and teens in mental health crisis in Santa Clara County. Pictured from left are VMC CEO Paul Lorenz; Santa Clara County Supervisors Susan Ellenberg, Joe Simitian and Cindy Chavez; Rovina Nimbalkar, executive director of National Alliance on Mental Illness Santa Clara; Sherri Terao, director of the Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services Department; and Michael Elliott, president and executive director of the VMC Foundation.

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SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Construction starts on county's first-ever inpatient mental health facility for youth

By Anne Gelhaus

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Officials broke ground Feb. 22 on a facility that will provide the first inpatient hospital beds for kids and teens in mental health crisis in Santa Clara County.

The three-story Adolescent Psychiatric Facility and Behavioral Health Services Center — linked to Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (VMC) — will provide inpatient hospital care as well as emergency and outpatient psychiatric services for children, adolescents and adults.

This 207,000-square-foot facility will feature divided age-appropriate amenities, including indoor and outdoor therapeutic environments, that allow for a continuum of care in a single setting.

The project — part of a new center for behavioral health services — was sparked by a comment Sigrid Pinsky, a member of the county's Behavioral Health Board, made to County Supervisor Joe Simitian in 2014 about the lack of beds for young people with mental health issues. Now, more than eight years later, after a what Simitian calls "painful" delays, construction has begun.

"Youth mental health needs were critical and mostly unmet in 2014 when I talked to Joe about the lack of beds in our county. The mental health crisis is worse now," Pinsky said in a statement. "It is tremendously satisfying that our county will soon be able to properly serve the hundreds of youth struggling with mental health challenges and make the stressful situation more manageable for their families."



COURTESY RENDERING

Construction began last month on the three-story Adolescent Psychiatric Facility and Behavioral Health Services Center linked to Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. The 207,000-square-foot facility will provide inpatient hospital care as well as emergency and outpatient psychiatric services for children, adolescents and adults. The new center is scheduled to open in late 2015.

Simitian said he proposed developing the center after learning that each year several hundred young people were transferred from county emergency rooms to hospitals as far as 100 miles away for acute psychiatric care. When youth are diagnosed as being a danger to themselves or others, they are placed on an involuntary 72-hour hold and transferred to the nearest inpatient facility. Because of liability and safety protocols, parents are often not allowed to drive their children and must wait for ambulance transport.

"Way too many of our kids are being hospitalized for psychiatric emergencies outside the county. Separating these kids from their families at one of the toughest times in their lives, that's just hell on them," Simitian said in a statement. "I'm also worried that the specter of long-distance treatment could deter kids and families from seeking the help they need in the first place."

In 2018, at Simitian's request, the county Board of Supervisors unanimously

approved development of the facility, which will also consolidate adult behavioral health services that were scattered throughout the VMC campus.

The county currently contracts with San Jose Behavioral Health to serve a limited number of teens ages 14-17. "It's far from what is needed to meet the demand, and doesn't offer anything for younger kids," said Simitian, noting also that the psychiatric facility is in South San Jose, "far removed from significant portions of the county."

The new facility replaces the 50-year-old Don Lowe Pavilion, which has housed adult Emergency Psychiatric Services and Mental Health Urgent Care for 50 years. The center will have 21 beds and an outdoor terrace for patients ages 13-17 years. Children 12 and younger have a separate unit with 14 beds and their own outdoor space. There will be 42 beds and two tree-screened outdoor terraces for adult inpatient care.

Emergency psychiatric services will be located on the ground level, along

with a shared pharmacy and divided outpatient urgent care for minors and adults. A rooftop recreation space will include a basketball court.

All of the center's services will share resources such as professional staff, support staff and storage. A skyway linked to VMC's emergency department will allow patients who have co-occurring medical issues to be treated on site.

The county expects local health care providers to refer children and adolescents to the new center, scheduled to open in late 2015.

November 17, 2020

Santa Clara County launches virtual teen mental health program during the coronavirus pandemic

Telehealth clinic brings services to youth 12 to 25 ahead of new clinic opening in Palo Alto next year

by Kevin Forestieri / Mountain View Voice
Uploaded: Tue, Nov 17, 2020



Local high school students will be able to access mental health services at little to no cost at a new center opening in Palo Alto next year. In the meantime, a virtual program is being rolled out. Above, Gunn High School freshmen Hyewon Ahn, left, and Anna Gersh, center, talk during a social-emotional learning class in 2017. Photo by Veronica Weber.

Starting this month, teens and young adults across Santa Clara County now have a place online to vent, hang out with peers and find new ways to cope with depression and anxiety -- all without having to leave home.

The program, dubbed Virtual You, kicked off as an alternative way to bring mental health services to youth ages 12 to 25 during a global pandemic, which has forced clinics to close and transition to telehealth. Virtual You was launched in lieu of in-person services at two new mental health clinics, one located in Palo Alto, which are now slated to open early next year.

Local and national studies have consistently found that about 1 in 5 children have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral health disorder, but few of those children ever receive services from a mental health professional -- allowing the disorders to get worse over time. County officials are seeking to intervene earlier through walk-in clinics that accept patients at no cost. The program, called Allcove, was expected to open its doors in May, but was delayed by the pandemic, slow permitting and pending construction.

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Virtual You is the workaround, and is the first online-only incarnation of Allcove. It is described as a one-stop shop for teens to learn coping skills and seek help for anxiety, stress and depression. It also has a less clinical, social component, giving teens a chance to connect for art groups, game nights and a "venting and sharing" group. Teens will also have a chance to work through school stress related to COVID-19, and can get help with resumes and job hunting during a pandemic.



Supervisor Joe Simitian

Allcove has been one of the county's most ambitious attempts at filling gaps in youth mental health care, which has been a priority for years. Early detection and diagnosis can keep disorders from worsening and is a key factor in suicide prevention.

"Time after time, the saddest part of the story is that a kid didn't reach out earlier, didn't have the opportunity to get help when they really needed it," Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian said in a statement. "The appeal of programs like Virtual You is that they're designed to engage youngsters who are struggling long before they hit a crisis point."

Anyone interested in signing up for Virtual You can call 408-961-4700 or email Lisa.hameed@hhs.sccgov.org.

Hospitals and clinics on the way

Allcove's launch of in-person services has been delayed multiple times. The start of the Palo Alto center, located at 2741 Middlefield Road, was bumped from May to October this year before being pushed back again to next year. County officials say the holdup has been caused due to a prolonged permitting process with the city of Palo Alto and building condition issues with the landlord of the property. The hope is to have construction done by January 2021 and open by March 2021.

The second Allcove location in San Jose received permits in June and is expected to finish construction next month.

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At a committee meeting last week, Simitian said that there needs to be a stronger sense of urgency. North County residents have been pushing for something like Allcove for years, he said, and the county has yet to respond in earnest.

"It has taken us five years to get to this point," he said. "Things are moving too darn slowly."

Santa Clara County is also seeking to construct a new inpatient psychiatric hospital for teens, filling an unmet need for beds. As it stands now, adolescent patients in crisis are sent to inpatient units outside of Santa Clara County, including Mills-Peninsula Hospital in San Mateo. The plan is to complete the design of the hospital by February next year and begin construction in February 2022.

Palo Alto Weekly

July 2, 2021



Magali Gauthier

Jeremy Peng, Paly student and member of allcove's Youth Advisory Group, describes the design of the counseling room at allcove Palo Alto during a tour of the youth mental health clinic on June 30.

Long-awaited clinic for youth opens

Palo Alto center is one of two in county that offers new approach to mental health care

By Kevin Forestieri

For teens and young adults, getting access to mental health care can be nearly impossible. Costs are exorbitant and insurance companies are reluctant to pay for it, and few professionals in the shrinking field of child psychiatry are able to take on new patients.

Santa Clara County is looking to change that starting this year, launching two clinics — one in Midtown Palo Alto and the other in San Jose — with an ambitious approach that's never been tried in the United States. Each is a one-stop shop where anyone aged 12 to 25 can walk in, find out what they need and

get help. No prior diagnosis or referral is required, and neither a lack of insurance nor ability to pay is a barrier.

The network of clinics, called allcove, has been in the works for nearly a decade and finally opened last week, each staffed by a broad team of clinicians, psychiatrists, psychologists and nurses. Anyone who walks in will have access to mental health support, primary care, substance-use addiction services and peer support.

Those with more pressing needs that can't be addressed at allcove, like housing, intensive treatment and care for early

psychosis, will be directly referred for help elsewhere.

Inside Palo Alto's center, at 2741 Middlefield Road, it's hard to tell allcove is a mental health clinic at all. Brightly colored furniture and large open spaces greet those who arrive, with more art slated to fill the reception area in the coming months. More than a dozen youth who make up the center's Youth Advisory Group made nearly all of the major design choices, pushing for an approach that's inviting to all.

So deeply involved were members of the advisory group that every hire — from clinical staff to the receptionist — was

vetted by youth, said Ana Lilia Soto, youth development manager for allcove. Doing so ensured that those who work at the clinic would be compatible with the teenagers and young adults coming in to seek help, she said.

"We have this thought of infantilizing youth instead of looking at their complexities, so we want to make sure that youth voices were expressed in the hiring," Soto said.

Though less flashy and filled with cubicles, the staff room inside allcove is a special place at the clinic and something that's hard to come by anywhere else, Soto said. It's rare to have a group of medical and mental health professionals all working in the same room together and able to freely communicate about the mutual patients they're serving, she said.

Stanford psychiatrist Steven Adelsheim, who spearheaded the effort to create allcove, said the "integrated care" model is important and should include things like physical health as well. Oftentimes medical ailments can be the reason for young people to walk through the door, but the physical symptoms indicate an underlying mental health condition that can be rooted out early.

"Lots of times a young person would come in with their headache or their stomachache and by the second or third visit you get to the underlying mental health issue," Adelsheim said. "Then you can do the warm handoff to the counselor next door and help make those connections."

The success of allcove will hinge on teens and young adults showing up at the door when they need help, so the Youth Advisory Group is trying to spread the word as much as possible. Jeremy Peng, a Palo Alto High School student and member of the group for the last year, said

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Clinic

he recently spoke at Gunn High School to let them know allcove is available to them and encouraging them to visit after school in the fall.

So far, he's found that sincere enthusiasm is the best way to lure his peers.

"That's the most important marketing to youth: You have to be passionate yourself to let people know that it is a community resource," Peng said.

County health officials have been pushing to create what would become allcove since 2016, responding to an alarming local mental health crisis. Suicide has long been the second leading cause of death among young people, and for more than a decade Palo Alto had the highest suicide rate among young people in Santa Clara County, including two sui-cide clusters. The worries prompted an epidemiological study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2017, which looked into the root causes.

Among the findings, the CDC found many young people in Palo Alto who died by suicide had "severe" mental health problems including schizophrenia, psychosis and chronic and severe depression. Circumstances leading up to their deaths included a recent crisis, an ongoing mental health problem, a history of treatment for mental illness or a history of suicidal thoughts or ideation.

Federal data shows that half of all cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and that an estimated 20% of teens ages 13 to 18 are living with a mental health condition. The vast majority do not receive treatment for years, if ever, and the average delay between symptoms and intervention is eight to 10 years.

County Supervisor Joe Simitian, who strongly supported the effort to create allcove, said the common thread is that teens are not reach-ing services early on before their condition becomes a crisis. He said the new approach — in which youth can simply walk in and get care with no preconditions — is

exactly what's needed for those who need help.

Allcove mirrors a similar network of mental health clinics launched in Australia in 2006 called headspace, which was the basis for spinoff programs like the Foundry Program in British Columbia and Jigsaw in Ireland. But getting it to work in the United States, with its myriad complexities related to costs, medical billing and the private insurance market, made it difficult to emulate locally.

County health officials, partnering with Stanford's Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbe-ing, pitched the idea to the state in 2018, receiving the greenlight to spend \$15 million in state funding on the project.

The funding comes from California's Mental Health Services Act, which provides millions of dollars to counties each year to bol-ster existing services and dabble in new ideas. Since the law's passing in 2004, Santa Clara County has largely failed to spend down the money and came narrowly close to losing the funds. The allcove

program is a major milestone in finally spending that money.

The original plan described a "ramp up" period ending in June 2018, suggesting there was a sig-nificant delay in opening allcove. Among the reasons, according to

Simitian, was the difficulty pull-ing together all of the partners and resources for a clinic that can provide everything from physical and mental health care to education and employment services. The pandemic also pushed back the start date, but that could be a good thing, he said.

"The fact that allcove is coming online as we're through the worst of the pandemic is fortuitous timing," Simitian said. "The emotional and mental health of a lot of young people have really taken a beating."

Email Staff Writer Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com.

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Allcove, the Next Step in Youth Mental Health

PROBLEM: Children of this generation face more than any before, leading to a high rate of anxiety, mental health problems and suicide with little access to healthcare.

SOLUTION: Create wraparound services to support children and teens before they encounter a crisis.

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Santa Clara County, Calif. has taken a revolutionary new approach to caring for the mental health of its youth with the first-in-the-country integrated care center, which opened last year. The center is designed for youth ages 12-25, who can walk in the door and speak to qualified professionals regardless of their ability to pay, referral status or other barriers.

“Too many of the models in place really don’t serve young people well until there is a moment of crisis, and we need to be helping these kids and young adults at an earlier opportunity” said Supervisor Joe Simitian, who first sponsored the program in 2016, including it in the county budget.

Simitian, a member of the Board of Advisors for Adolescent Counseling Services, first heard of the Allcove (also spelled allcove) program, then called Headspace, from Dr. Steven Adelsheim, a child psychiatrist and director of the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing. Adelsheim pitched the concept in December of 2015. The two have worked tirelessly to create the facilities for allcove in Palo Alto and San Jose, which opened their doors in June.

Simitian and Adelsheim aimed to create early mental health intervention systems in a way that is welcoming to teens and fights the stigma of mental health treatment.

“Half of all mental health conditions have their onset by the age of 14 and three quarters



Photo: (L-r): Sherri Terao, director, Behavioral Health Services Department, County of Santa Clara, Dr. Steven Adelsheim, director, Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing, Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian. Photo courtesy of Santa Clara County

by the age of 24,” Adelsheim said. “We really don’t have the public mental health system in place to do early detection and intervention for the half of all young people that are developing these mental health conditions.”

With the increased strain on children caused by the pandemic, the CDC has seen an increase in mental health-related emergency cases.

The proportion of mental health-related visits for children ages 5-11 increased 24 percent and for ages 12-17, it was 31 percent, the CDC noted in a 2020 report.

A survey conducted by the Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago saw a sharp increase in parents concerned about the mental health of their children, with 71 percent of parents saying the pandemic hurt their children’s mental health.

To properly face the challenges made worse by the pandemic, the Allcove facilities have trained professionals available in person or by telemedicine to help with physical or mental care. Through the

multi-disciplinary specialists on site, youths can find peer support, mental and physical health counseling, substance use services and more.

Allcove has a robust presence on social media, with advertisements and information readily available to get the word out about its existence to young people.

Allcove also partners with youth groups, and its representatives attend and host events, speak at local schools and use targeted marketing tools to raise awareness of the program.

The Palo Alto location is easily reached through the bus system and is situated in a critical area which has long faced the highest number of youth suicides in Santa Clara County.

“We’re staffing this up with the idea of trying to see about 1,000 young people annually at each center,” said Adelsheim, who has worked in the field of child psychiatry since 1990 and has worked for the last nine years on creating the Allcove program.

The county used funds gen-

erated by a 1 percent income tax on personal income in excess of \$1 million in California known as the Mental Health Services Act. The county sought approval to use their portion of the funding to create Allcove, and the pitch immediately attracted the attention and support of the state.

“We’re certainly seeing more young people coming in with increasing levels of anxiety, increasing levels of depression, increased concerns about grief and loss because of the pandemic” said Adelsheim.

“Many people have lost family members or loved ones, and also have lost really important life milestones to be able to celebrate. These issues are already there but I think... they’ve been heightened by all of the struggles our families have faced over the last several years.”

One of the challenges to providing wraparound services and early intervention care in the United States is funding and recovering expenses, said Simitian. Adelsheim said it will be critical to the success of the model in the United States

to foster partnerships with healthcare and insurance providers.

In less than a year since opening, Allcove has garnered the support of state legislators who have opened funding streams to replicate the program as well as researchers studying the two locations.

In 2022, nearby Orange County will see a facility modeled after the Santa Clara program open at the University of California at Irvine. Four additional Allcove projects have been funded by California’s Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission, one in San Mateo County, one in Sacramento County and two in Los Angeles County.

Last year Simitian noted: “Time after time, the saddest part of the story is that a kid didn’t reach out earlier, didn’t have the opportunity to get help when they really needed it.”

For more information, contact Adelsheim at sadelsheim@stanford.edu.

Los Altos Town Crier

Community news for Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and Mountain View since 1947

August 18, 2021

Tools for teens

County sponsors \$250K partnership that creates Mental Health First Aid pilot program for students

Special to the Town Crier

Santa Clara County's collection of youth mental health services will soon get a new addition, the result of a burgeoning partnership between the county and the nonprofit Project Safety Net and Momentum for Health.

County Supervisor Joe Simitian proposed the partnership, which aims to implement a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) pilot program for high school students in the North County and West Valley. The County Board of Supervisors approved \$250,000 in initial funding for the proposal in June.

"We know the past year has been especially tough on young people," Simitian said. "But there has long been a need for greater mental health services for youth in our county. This program should provide one more tool teens can use to improve their own well-being and help others in need as well."

MHFA is a training course that teaches participants how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health concerns, mental illnesses and substance use disorders such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and addictions.

Participants learn about local

mental health resources, support groups and online tools, and gain the skills needed to reach out and provide help to someone who is experiencing a crisis or may be developing a mental health or substance use problem.

Youth-focused training

Although the National Council for Mental Wellbeing brought MHFA training to the U.S. more than a decade ago, the programs initially focused on adults and those who worked directly with youth rather than the youth themselves. In 2019, however, the council piloted a teen MHFA program in partnership with Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation to bring the program to high schools across the country. High schools in Livermore, Northridge and Marysville were the only California sites initially selected.

But the demand for peer-to-peer support services in Santa Clara County has been growing for some time, according to Mary Gloner, CEO of Palo Alto-based Project Safety Net.

"Since I joined Project Safety Net five years ago, I have heard repeatedly from young people that they would like to be better prepared to help their friends and classmates when dealing with a mental health issue," Gloner said.



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

A new training course equips teens with tools for more powerful peer support.

Peer support is especially important during the teenage years, said Meghna Singh, a 2019 graduate of Gunn High School and Project Safety Net Board of Directors vice chair, who referenced recent "suicide clusters" in Palo Alto.

"Young people turn to their friends to share exciting moments, but also vent about the tough times, especially as they relate to mental health issues," Singh said. "After the second suicide cluster in our community, I was desperate to learn how I could support my class-

mates who were struggling with their mental health so that we would not lose another student to suicide." Through researching online and talking to professionals, Singh said she was able to piece together how young people can support their own mental health and their peers', but she wished the resources were more accessible for youth.

Pandemic heightens problems

David K. Mineta, president and CEO of Momentum for Health, said young people in Santa Clara County are especially in need of mental health

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FIRST AID

support due to high-pressure school and home environments, as well as a lack of access to on-campus support systems, conditions that have only been further exacerbated during the pandemic. “Over the past year, we have seen an acute increase in the number of youth who need mental health services due to isolation, stress and anxiety brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic,” Mineta said. “As we begin to reclaim a bit of normalcy, mental health programs and services must be in place. They’re essential to the well-being and future success of local youth.”

Data from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing demonstrates that the need for youth mental health support and early intervention extends nationwide. In the U.S. alone:

- One in five teens has had a serious mental health disorder at some point in his or her life.

- Half of all mental illnesses begin by age 14, and 75% by the mid-20s.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds.

In addition, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that mental health-related emergency room visits increased by 31% between April and October 2020 for youth ages 12-17.

“Using Project Safety Net’s connections and Momentum’s experience and success with implementing and evaluating a Mental Health First Aid Training program, this collaborative effort has the potential to act as the catalyst to reduce emergency room and hospital visits for mental health care as well as provide young adults with the education and knowledge needed to take care of their own mental health and those around them,” Mineta said.

Hannah Zhang, a senior at Gunn High, added: “Teen Mental Health First Aid is so valuable because it teaches students and young people to recognize and respond to signs – especially because it’s not always easy to reach out to adults. Having friends to support each other would be awesome.”

The pilot effort plans to involve the Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District, the Fremont Union High School District and the Palo Alto Unified School District. Gloner said she hopes the program can expand to the rest of the county once other communities see the positive impact of the pilot.

Training also will be provided for parents, guardians and educators.

For more information, visit mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

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PALO ALTO

Youth organization expanding mental health services

County supervisors are partnering with it to provide more resources

By Aldo Toledo

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PALO ALTO » Santa Clara County is partnering with Youth Community Services to expand access to substance use and suicide prevention services for young people on the Peninsula, Supervisor Joe Simitian's office

has announced.

County funding for YCS comes from grants the federal government's American Rescue Plan Act passed in 2021, according to Simitian. Initially \$150,000 was approved by the Board of Supervisors in May of this year, but now the board has agreed to increase the allocation to \$225,000 so YCS can expand to more communities and run its program through June next year.

"These are tough times for

young people and their parents," said Simitian, who serves as chair of the County's Health and Hospital Committee. "There's a tremendous need for preventative mental health services for our youth; fortunately, Youth Community Services has a unique model that brings services directly to kids."

The funds are set to go to Youth Connect, an after-school program founded in 2017 that connects high schoolers to peers and adults who can give them

support and provide workshops and volunteer projects to help young people "grow and thrive," according to the organization.

YCS said Youth Connect "protects teens and adolescents from the many risk factors that can harm their mental health." The program helps young people learn how to build positive relationships, foster social connectedness and engage with the community.

The program was started in

YCS

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response to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Epi-Aid Suicide Prevention report, which outlines findings on youth suicides in recent years. With the pandemic's effect on already-isolated young people, cases of mental illness

doubled through the pandemic, according to new CDC data.

"By pooling our resources with the city of Palo Alto and the county, we have been able to do so much more," said Moraoommen, Executive Director of Youth Community Services. "We have connected young people directly with peer leaders their own age. Our peer

leaders have hosted in-person workshops, undertaken service projects and produced educational videos that amplify youth voices."

High schoolers, Simitian's office said, are under growing strain and pressure that can lead to substance use and suicide, so the county is also collaborating with local schools to combat the rise in youth fentanyl overdoses by get-

ting Narcan — the lifesaving overdose medicine — into the hands of parents and educators.

Since 2015, the Santa Clara County Opioid Overdose Prevention Project has worked with community partners to help reduce opioid overdose and deaths in the county. Over the past five years, the county has distributed over 10,000 Narcan kits and approved

\$135,000 to purchase Narcan kits for each high school in the county that wants one.

Supervisor Simitian and former Palo Alto Mayor Karen Holman were earlier supporters of the program and helped secure funding from the county and city to get it started.

As a former Palo Alto school board member, Simitian says he knows just

how important these programs can be for young people struggling with mental health and substance use issues.

"We can't expect kids to be resilient all on their own," Simitian said. "For a lot of them, it's tough out there. There is help, though, and we need to let folks know about the programs and services available to them."