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State continues ‘Let’s Talk Mental Health’ series

Woonsocket, R.I. – The Executive Office of Health and Human Services and its partners continued a series of public conversations to raise awareness about mental health, addiction and available treatment on Thursday, Sept. 27.

The event was held at St. James Episcopal Church in partnership with Community Care Alliance, a Woonsocket-based health and human services nonprofit agency. Central to Community Care Alliance’s mission is the empowerment of people challenged by economic insecurity, mental illness and addictions, housing issues and other trauma-related concerns.

“The first step toward breaking down mental health barriers in Rhode Island is simply by starting the conversation,” Secretary Eric J. Beane said. “We cannot change what we don’t first acknowledge – and own – as a community. From our homes to our social centers to our boardrooms and government buildings, talking about behavioral health – like physical health – should be encouraged. No one should suffer in silence.”

In May, Governor Gina M. Raimondo signed [Executive Order 18-03](#), which reaffirms and expands Rhode Island’s commitment to people with mental illness and substance use disorders. The Executive Order calls for a series of public discussions designed to help inspire public dialogue about Rhode Islanders’ mental health experiences and perspectives – and to promote understanding and awareness about treatment.

Behavioral health has long been a taboo topic – downplayed as a sign of weakness and not met with the same urgency or seriousness as physical health. Changing attitudes and perceptions around behavioral health is key to ensuring people seek treatment and have a chance to find success in recovery. Through this series, the State is encouraging members of the public to participate and share their personal thoughts, stories, experiences and ideas.

“One in five adults experience a mental illness in a given year, but less than half receive mental health services and the consequences can be significant,” said Rebecca Boss, Director of the RI Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals. “These Town Halls will allow us to hear from Rhode Islanders about what is working and what needs improvement in our system. Our goal is to further educate the public about the treatment available and continue these important conversations so that we can break down barriers to care.”

The panel touched on the importance of all members of the community – including veterans and youth – having access to treatment and receiving education about the resources available in Rhode Island.

“We need to better educate our veterans about the mental, behavioral, and emotional consequences of combat on the human mind, body and soul,” said Kasim Yarn, Rhode Island’s Director of Veterans Affairs. “It’s important to know that these challenges are normal and expected. I’m proud to be a part of a

continuing conversation on reducing the stigma and helping Rhode Islanders who answered the call of duty to access the best care and resources available.”

“All children, youth and families in our state deserve access to quality mental and behavioral health services, and it’s wonderful to hear directly from the community about how the state can best support their needs,” said Trista Piccola, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families.

The panel also spoke of the addiction crisis that is devastating communities and families nationwide. Tom Coderre, senior advisor to the Office of the Governor and former Obama Administration advisor on substance abuse and mental health services, said: “One of the most important ways we can change attitudes about mental health and addiction is to talk openly about our journey to recovery. I tell my story to family members, friends and wherever I go in the community to let people know there is hope and recovery is possible for everyone.”

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