



## Take Care of Your Mental Health During the Pandemic

***By City Attorney Mara W. Elliott***

Protecting our families during a health crisis requires keeping track of a lot of numbers.

You may be following the frequency of COVID outbreaks, the total cases in your zip code, the county unemployment rate, border wait times, or maybe the entire dashboard of statistics that determine whether schools and businesses are open or closed.

All of these numbers come to bear on the one measurement we don't talk about enough: the level of our anxiety.

Nearly 50 percent of Americans say the ongoing pandemic is harming their mental health. As your City Attorney, I see every day how that impacts our community – through domestic violence, threats of suicide, and dangerous behavior that requires intervention.

This rise corresponds with warnings from health experts that pandemic-induced stressors – such as job loss, food insecurity, fear, and isolation – can exacerbate mental health issues and increase incidents of substance abuse, depression, and suicidal ideation.

My Office has seen a recent spike in the number of mental health-related Gun Violence Restraining Orders (GVROs), which may be attributable to pandemic-induced stress. GVROs are used to remove firearms from a person who threatens violence or poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or others.

Individuals who have a diagnosed mental illness, or are experiencing a mental health crisis, including post-traumatic stress disorder, dementia, and depression, have been the respondents in nearly half of all GVROs obtained from March through July of 2020.

Stress and uncertainty can also contribute to escalating household tensions. For anyone sheltering in place with an abusive partner or family member, the risks are heightened by their reduced contact with friends and family who might otherwise intervene or report.

It's important for everyone to be on the lookout for each other, and to thoughtfully respond before situations reach a breaking point.

If you know someone who may be susceptible to domestic violence, and you've fallen out of contact because of the pandemic, check in when you know they can talk freely. If your friends or neighbors are elderly, keep in touch, as they may be especially vulnerable to the impacts of isolation. Anticipate trouble before it happens. The City of San Diego requires safe storage of firearms inside the home. All guns must be locked or disabled at home, unless in the immediate control of the owner. This law prevents children, and people suffering from mental illness or depression from getting ahold of a loaded weapon and acting impulsively.

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If you or someone you know needs help dealing with or getting out of an abusive home situation, please contact our Family Justice Center at (619) 533-6000 or 866-933-HOPE (4673). For 24-hour assistance, call the San Diego Domestic Violence Hotline at 888-385-4657.

I urge everyone to reflect on how you and your family members are feeling, and to seek help when needed. It's not weak or embarrassing to seek assistance – it's an act of caring for yourself and others.

Here are some resources you may find helpful:

- 2-1-1 San Diego is a 24/7 confidential phone service that connects people with community, health, and disaster services. Dial 2-1-1. <<https://211sandiego.org/>>
- San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) Behavioral Health Services provides an array of mental health, alcohol and drug services for children, youth, families, adults, and seniors. <<https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/hhsa/programs/bhs/>>
- San Diego Access and Crisis Line provides 24/7 counseling for suicide prevention, crisis intervention, community resources, mental health referrals, and alcohol and drug support services. (888) 724-7240. <<https://stage-cq5.optumhealthsandiego.com/content/sandiego/en/access---crisis-line.html>>
- San Diego Veterans Administration Health System has a 24-hour Veterans Crisis Line to connect callers to caring, qualified responders with the Department of Veterans Affairs, many of whom are veterans themselves. (800) 273-8255. <<https://www.sandiego.va.gov/>>

Stay safe and stay healthy, and don't forget to pay attention to your state of mind and your physical well-being.

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