

The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty presents

COVID-19 Funder Briefs (4 of 6)

Mental Health

Amid the pandemic and new financial and health hardships faced by individuals and families, Jewish organizations providing services and support in the mental health arena have needed to work differently while, at the same time, responding to and preparing for new and growing needs.

The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty is highlighting these agency efforts, looking at concrete opportunities to invest in the work and help sustain the organizations working tirelessly in the field.

Needs and Challenges

Agencies are seeing increased and expanded need from both non-traditional clientele in seek of support, and existing clients experiencing new trauma. There is also a growing communal need for both brief solution-focused sessions and support groups. To best address these needs, agencies must build capacity to expand and ramp up services.

Rising unemployment has increased the need for mental health services to work in collaboration with other social service and workforce development agencies. There is a particular need for agencies to provide job counseling and emotional support services for new college graduates, as they face significant and unexpected challenges in finding employment.

Growing demand and new clientele also requires a greater need for organizational partnerships, effective marketing methods to promote programs, and wraparound or collocated social services that address a broad range of issues in the community, including mental health.

The pandemic has brought on a dramatic increase in need for tele-mental health sessions. Agencies have pivoted quickly and are making the necessary transitions to continue delivering services. The challenges of moving from in-person to online care are compounded by the fact that technology and Wi-Fi service is financially prohibitive for many clients, limiting their access to services.

Jewish Family and Community Services East Bay shares that "Video and phone counseling and therapy have proved to be unexpectedly effective during this crisis."

Investment Opportunities: First Response

- As human service agencies ramp up and pivot services, they need support for transitions to virtual platforms and funds to train for new models of intervention.
- Organizations need support to **invest in and train mentors and volunteers**, harnessing the desire and energy of community members who wish to help while supporting the work of organizations over the long term.
- Agencies need funds to assist individuals who are not able to pay for **technology, devices, or internet service**.
- Agencies need funding to support **marketing efforts** so that community members know how to navigate and access new and changing services.
- Agencies need support for **coordination and development of wraparound services** that include mental health services.

Investment Opportunities: Organizational Resilience and Sustainability

Organizations need support for effective long-term capacity growth, organizational planning, and infrastructure, including—

- **Hiring and onboarding new staff**, growing volunteer base, and providing additional support for existing staff.
- Robust **technology infrastructure**, devices, Wi-Fi, and tech support to sustain remote work where needed.
- Continued delivery of **virtual services** and critical transitions to tele-health.
- Assessment, scaling and replication of service delivery, and **new, innovative programs**.
- Management of **agency coordination** such as colocation of programs and wraparound social services that include mental health services.

Organizations continue to need **general operating funds to enable flexibility and sustainability** as they face increased expenses amidst potentially declining revenues due to a difficult fundraising climate and the possibility of deep government cuts. Since the Covid pandemic began, these organizations have had to dip deeply into their reserves in order to serve critical client needs. Without funds to restore their stability and viability, some organizations are at risk of closing, potentially leaving clients underserved or with nowhere to turn.

Emergency funds will continue to be critical in addressing unexpected and rapidly growing client and organizational needs.

A Jewish Children and Family Services in a major metro area speaks of impactful initiatives such as—

Support groups in partnership with Jewish Federation Young Leadership Division facilitated by our counseling and career services staff to more holistically support those who are out of work.

Training for synagogue volunteers to do wellness phone check-ins for isolated congregants.

Online COVID bereavement support groups.

Addressing Needs: Opportunities and New Directions

Support for technology can be leveraged for broad impact. Remote service delivery has been necessary due to the pandemic and will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future. But in addition to meeting the needs imposed by current social distancing guidelines, this transition will enable agencies to serve more people over the long term, which will be important given the increased need agencies are already seeing and the much greater need expected as the deeper economic and mental health impacts of the pandemic begin to be felt. Agencies will need support for the kind of technology infrastructure that will enable them to apply what they are learning now to developing new models for delivering essential services. This kind of support will help scale services so agencies can serve more people and grow community impact.

Philanthropic Response

Foundations and donors are invited to reach out and join in this work within the framework of the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty.

Please contact **Deena Fuchs, Executive Vice President of Jewish Funders Network**, at Deena@jfunders.org to learn more.

Data, quotes, and other insights included in this brief are sourced from convenings, webinars, and work-group meetings hosted by the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty; JFN COVID-19 response surveys; and organizational websites.