NEW REPORT FROM LEADING MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS REVEALS IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS SERVICES

KENTWOOD, MI (April 10, 2020): A recent national survey of behavioral health crisis service providers reveals that crisis services are severely impacted by the effects of COVID-19, as workers are overwhelmed and service demand is fluctuating dramatically. This includes Mobile Crisis Teams, Crisis Residential Programs, and Crisis Call Centers across the country.

A report released by TBD Solutions LLC in conjunction with other leading mental health organizations analyzed the responses of over 350 crisis providers, including 147 Mobile Crisis Teams, 130 Crisis Residential Programs, and 93 Crisis Call Centers. The research revealed a crisis system susceptible to the same issues as its medical counterparts that must be treated with the same heightened consideration. Survey responses were elicited from members of the American Association of Suicidology, the Crisis Residential Association, and the National Association of Crisis Organization Directors.

“As illness spreads in our area, there will be reduction in our workforce due to illness, isolation, and return-to-work policies,” one respondent to the survey stated. “Staff [have] concerns about continuing to work amid the public health concern.”

“The longer COVID-19 progresses in the United States, the greater the importance of behavioral health crisis services on public health,” says Travis Atkinson, Crisis Systems Consultant with TBD Solutions. “This pandemic has become the great equalizer for helpers and persons served, yet the physical and mental stability of our behavioral health workforce is crucial in preventing and treating mental health crises and avoiding the unintended consequences of social distancing, such as suicide and untreated mental illness.”

Responses to the survey fell into six main categories:

- **Staffing**: Morale and workforce stability have been compromised, leaving supervisors with few solutions to keep their services intact.
- **Health Concerns**: Employees maintain a fear of contracting and/or spreading COVID-19.
- **Clinical Services and Client/Caller Support**: With so much attention and energy devoted to COVID-19 risks, programs have less human and financial resources to devote to treatment interventions.
- **Equipment/Supplies/Technology**: Dozens of respondents reported inadequate supplies of critical PPE needed to do their jobs, and limited technology and IT equipment is inhibiting some Crisis Call Centers and Mobile Crisis Teams from moving to a remote workforce.
- **Operations/Sustainability**: When some crisis services exist in fee-for-service models, reduced referrals means reduced income, forcing some providers to make difficult staffing and operations decisions.
- **Community Resources**: Outpatient therapists, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospital beds, primary care clinics, and other critical resources have reduced service capacity or offer services remotely, an option that is not accessible for those with limited resources.

“Crisis services play such an absolutely vital role in ensuring our nation’s health and well-being,” says Colleen Creighton, CEO of the American Association of Suicidology. “Unfortunately, this study illuminates just what an incredible burden COVID-19 is placing on an already under-
funded, at near-capacity system. These are individuals that continuously sacrifice their time to selflessly care for us and our communities, day-in and day-out, all year round. As the national conversation turns to our country’s recovery, we need to work to ensure that behavioral health crisis services and their needs are a factor in that dialogue.”

**MOBILE CRISIS CHALLENGES:** Mobile Crisis Teams reported an overwhelmed workforce due to health concerns (71%) and a lack of critical supplies (71%), such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). More than 1 in 3 teams reported inadequate technology to work remotely (37%), increased demands on first responders with care coordination (36%), and an overwhelmed workforce due to fewer staff.

Forty-eight percent of Mobile Crisis Teams reported a decrease in calls.

**CRISIS RESIDENTIAL CHALLENGES:** 70% of Crisis Residential Programs reported an overwhelmed workforce due to health concerns and a lack of critical supplies as major concerns. Over half of respondents also cited attrition due to health concerns (53%) and an overwhelmed workforce due to fewer staff (51%) as considerable challenges.

Forty-eight percent of Crisis Residential Programs reported a decrease in referrals.

**CRISIS CALL CENTER CHALLENGES:** Crisis Call Centers identified lack of critical supplies (47%), an overwhelmed workforce due to increased referrals (45%), and attrition due to health concerns (35%) as their most pressing challenges.

Almost half (49%) of all respondents reported an increase in call volume since the onset of COVID-19, with some stating they are receiving double the usual volume.

About TBD Solutions LLC: TBD Solutions (Kentwood, Michigan) is a national consulting, training, and research firm specializing in behavioral health crisis system design, function, and performance. Formed in 2011, TBD Solutions is committed to the values of high-quality, cost-effective, and client-centered care that effectively meets the urgent and ongoing needs of individuals receiving services. Learn more at www.tbdtranslation.com.

About AAS: The American Association of Suicidology is the world’s largest membership-based suicide prevention organization. Founded in 1968 by Edwin S. Shneidman, PhD, AAS promotes the research of suicide and its prevention, public awareness programs, public education and training for professionals and volunteers. The membership of AAS includes mental health and public health professionals, researchers, suicide prevention and crisis intervention centers, school districts, crisis center volunteers, survivors of suicide loss, attempt survivors, and a variety of laypersons who have an interest in suicide prevention. You can learn more about AAS at www.suicidology.org.

About CRA: The Crisis Residential Association and its members exist to support the operational and clinical functions of residential alternatives to psychiatric hospitalization. Rooted in the values of empathy, recovery, and continuous improvement, the association seeks to connect providers with the best ideas in behavioral health treatment to transform the way people receive mental health care. More information is available at www.crisisresidentialnetwork.com.

About NASCOD: The National Association of Crisis Organization Directors is an organization for social service professionals serving as Executive Directors or Program Directors of crisis organizations. NASCOD’s mission is to provide support and professional development for executive directors and program managers. More information is available at www.nascod.org.