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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Cook County Launches Mental Health Campaign to Address Challenges Caused by COVID**

Bridgeview, Ill. – To help address the increase in reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and substance use since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) today launched a bilingual mental health campaign, called *Here to Hear You*, in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Chicago. According to one 2021 study, nearly half of Americans reported recent symptoms of an anxiety or depression, and 10 percent of respondents felt their mental health needs were not being met.

“*Here to Hear You* represents another critical step in our continued commitment to the well-being of all Cook County residents, especially those most in need of behavioral health services,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “Cook County is proud to partner with NAMI Chicago to offer residents immediate and direct access to services from the comfort and privacy of their own homes.”

“As we continue to contend with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that Cook County residents know they are not alone when it comes to feelings of stress, anxiety and depression is critically important,” said Cook County Health Chief Executive Officer Israel Rocha. “This partnership with NAMI will amplify the availability of resources for those in need.”

“Mental health affects everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from,” said CCDPH Chief Operating Officer, Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. “The purpose of the *Here to Hear You* campaign is to normalize seeking help for mental health issues and connect individuals and families with the support and resources they need.”

Made possible with funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health COVID-19 Response Grant, ads will run throughout Cook County and culminate with Mental Health Awareness Month in May. Radio commercials began airing today, on four English (107.5 WGCI, V103 WVAZ, Power 92 WPWX and 106.3 WSRB) and four Spanish (105.1 WOJO, 106.7 WPPN, 93.5 WVIV and 107.9 WLEY) stations. Geotargeted streaming audio ads focus on reaching suburban Cook County residents living in communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19, who are between the ages of 18 and 34 years old, and other high-risk groups, including people who are Black and female, homeless or housing insecure, and/or who identify as LGBTQ+.

“Through the helpline, our trained staff work to share hope and connection with people on their mental health journeys,” said NAMI Chicago Chief Executive Officer Alexa James. “We are available 7 days a week to meet callers where they are in their need for support and services. We’re enthusiastic about the *Here to Hear You* campaign and leadership Cook County Department of Public Health is demonstrating in sharing this message.”

A NAMI Chicago representative was on-hand to speak with shoppers and distribute resource cards at the campaign soft-launch at Chicago Ridge Mall and River Oaks Mall on Dec. 29 and 30. Hot cocoa stations offered hot chocolate as a way to warm up the conversation around mental health and address winter blues.

If you or someone you know is experiencing having trouble sleeping, eating, getting through the day, NAMI Chicago is here to hear you and connect you to resources. For more information, visit [NAMChicago.org](http://NAMChicago.org) or call 833-NAMI-CHI (833-626-4244).

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