

## **Title: Youth-Led Town Hall Explores Mental Health in San Diego County**

**Written by Rachel An, Katie Tran, Lauren Levy, & Stephanie Hernandez, Youth Leaders, Live Well San Diego Youth Leadership Team 2023-2024**

Mental health has been a widely discussed topic for years as its relevance continues to rise. [It's Up To Us San Diego](#) shares that 1 in 5, or about 3 million, youth in the United States have a diagnosable mental health challenge. Despite this, around 66% go untreated.

After seeing these statistics, the *Live Well San Diego* Youth Leaders discussed the impact of mental health in their own lives and communities, as well as the need for awareness on the subject. These discussions inspired the team to organize a youth-led town hall to publicly discuss different aspects of mental health and to educate local youth and representatives to increase awareness of these issues.

On January 13, 2024, the Youth Leaders hosted the [Youth For Mental Health Town Hall: Informing, Sharing, Discussing](#) both virtually on Zoom and in person at the Mira Mesa Public Library, to inform attendees on methods to combat this growing crisis.

Topics included:

1. Knowing the warning signs and risks,
2. Finding available resources,
3. Getting help and overcoming barriers to care,
4. Finding peer and community support, and
5. Understanding the 211 San Diego and San Diego Access and Crisis Line (988) call centers.

Group discussions and a Q&A session followed the presentations. The Youth Leaders also shared a personal story and held a powerful silent show of hands, showcasing how prevalent mental health issues are in our day-to-day lives.

The mental health crisis has exacerbated associated crises such as rising suicide rates. To better inform and prepare community members, youth and subject matter experts led various presentations about the challenges and solutions of current systems of support.

- As a member of the Communication & Engagement Team with the [County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services \(BHS\)](#), Annika Manlutac presented changes in San Diego County's system of implementation and ways to bridge gaps in County-related services and care.
- Sheila Brooker from the [San Diego Access and Crisis Line](#) (or 988) and Adrian Carstens, Director of [211 Services](#), clarified common misconceptions about call center services and answered further inquiries in a panel.

- As a youth and topic expert, Issac Lara addressed youth perspective and peer support, highlighting legislation and youth involvement.

These speakers offered diverse perspectives and backgrounds, presenting a wide range of resources and insight. From County representatives to frontline workers to youth, this town hall served as a bridge to numerous forms of mental health care in San Diego County.

An additional goal of this town hall was to help collect input from youth to inform the efforts of the County of San Diego regarding youth mental health care. This was achieved through a group discussion and an anonymous feedback form. The discussion was led by Michelle Alcantar, a Community Health Promotion Specialist with the Maternal, Child, and Family Health Services Branch of the County of San Diego Public Health Services, who explained that the purpose of their upcoming needs assessment was to help identify ways in which services can be improved for youth over the next five years. Youth in attendance offered their input to help shape the upcoming assessment, including how to best refer to them, how to reach them for feedback, and what survey formatting would make them most likely to respond.

At the end of the town hall, a link to a feedback form was sent to attendees. This form had questions to gauge the effectiveness/popularity of certain services, as well as questions to improve future town halls. Feedback from the town hall showed that youth generally felt they had an improved understanding of the different services available to them, as well as improved readiness for a mental health crisis and opportunities to improve future town halls.

Video: [Youth Led Town Hall - Mental Health - January 2024](#)

Slides: [Youth For Mental Health: Informing, Sharing, Discussing](#)

To learn more about the *Live Well San Diego* Youth Sector visit [LiveWellSD.org/youth](https://LiveWellSD.org/youth). For any questions, please contact [LiveWellYouth@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:LiveWellYouth@sdcounty.ca.gov).