

Mental health drive addresses rash of suicides

Mental health problem is a growing concern for the Quezon City government

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Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte is prioritizing her office's mental health program to help address a rash of suicides among young constituents.



The Quezon City Police District has recorded 96 suicides a year since 2018.

The Persons with Disability Affairs Office also recorded 5,154 individuals with mental and psychosocial disabilities as of November, the figure comprising 23 percent of the more than 22,000 Persons with Disabilities who registered for the QC PWD card.

Belmonte announced over the weekend that she ordered local government officials to take initial steps to promote mental well-being, particularly in schools, invest in treatments and other “holistic approaches that focus on care over and above treatment.”

“As early as last year, we have extended assistance to public schools by hiring justly compensated mental health professionals like therapists and counselors who will recognize mental health warning signs early on and provide short-term counseling and crisis interventions,” Belmonte said.

Recently, the city government established Mental Wellness Access Hubs in each of the city's six districts. The hubs disburse free prescription medicines to persons with mental health disabilities. Assessment by specialists for anxiety and depression are also available at the hubs for those with no access to prescriptions. The city government also hired more mental health professionals to be assigned in different fields such as in the PDAO to help contribute to policy making and conceptualization of programs, and in resident care facilities for the disadvantaged and marginalized.

To further boost the city's existing efforts, the City Council has approved and confirmed Ordinance SP-3158, S-2022 or the Quezon City Mental Health Code which localizes the National Mental Health Act and incorporates all existing mental health programs of the city into one, comprehensive legal framework. The measure aims to focus on five key areas. First, it mandates the training, education, and awareness-raising for all local service providers, beginning with the Quezon City government employees, barangay officials and personnel, and school teaching and non-teaching staff.

This ordinance ensures that the promotion of mental wellness “from prevention, treatment, care, and support services in relation to mental health” are accessible to all Quezon City residents regardless of age, gender and socio-economic circumstances.

Second, expansion of the services offered in Mental Wellness Access Hubs to include diagnosis and crisis intervention, and disbursement of free prescription medication.

Third, the establishment of a 24/7 Mental Health Hotline for QCitizens.

Fourth, the establishment of a Mental Health Half-way Home, which will serve as a temporary housing facility for recovering service users that would offer therapy and employment assistance among others.

And lastly, there will be an information and service delivery network that aims to pool together all specialists from within and outside the city.

The city government established Mental Wellness Access Hubs.

This referral network will provide the linkages to assist service users, their families and service providers such as social workers, carers and professionals, in order to address their needs by making available health, legal, social and even law enforcement services.

In a speech she delivered during the National Mental Health Month in November, Belmonte declared, "It is our moral responsibility as a local government to contribute to alleviating the state of mental health care that studies depict are exacerbated by chronic underinvestment, lack of mental health professionals, the prohibitive cost of consultation and treatment, and the persistent stigmatization of mental health problems."