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Help for depression is available and now much easier to access

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ATLANTA – Depression Awareness Month, a national observance celebrated in October, serves to remind people that help is available and in Georgia is now much easier to access thanks to the first statewide crisis and access line, 1-800-715-4225, established in July. Last month, more than 20,000 people called the 24-hour, 7-day-a-week hotline to be connected to mental health services throughout the state. The majority of the callers were suffering from depression. The good news is that with prompt intervention, depression is treatable.

"We have built a system that makes getting help easier and faster," said Gwen Skinner, Director for the Georgia Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases, whose division funds and oversees the access line. "Depression Awareness Month gives us the opportunity to reinforce key messages about when, how and where to get help."

On any given day, the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) receives calls from people – young and old- who are in immediate crisis, including those who are contemplating taking their lives. "Recently, a 12 year old girl contacted us, stating that she wanted to hurt herself and was considering using her father's rifle. At the time that she called, she was home alone," said Emeka Wolfe, a licensed social worker who has been working as a first responder for three years. "Fortunately, we were able to locate the child's parents and stayed with her on the phone for more than an hour until her parents returned home. The parents were unaware that their daughter was depressed."

Georgians are also using GCAL to better understand the signs of mental illness, the types of mental health services that are available and what to expect when seeking help.

They are learning how to identify effective substance abuse support, family counseling, children and adolescent, and in-home services. Consumers are also being connected to unique services in which people who have recovered from mental illness serve as mentors. These mentors help others with mental illness navigate the process of getting effective help and avoid relapse.

In Georgia, one out of five children is affected by mental illness and untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide. National reports indicate that mental illness is on the rise and that not knowing where or when to get help is often a large part of the problem.

GCAL, which provides support 24 hours and seven days a week, is operated by Behavioral Health Link (BHL), an Atlanta-based health and crisis call center, which has been handling single-point-of-entry services in Georgia for eight years. MHDDAD and BHL are working diligently to increase statewide awareness of GCAL and where Georgians can get help.