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For Immediate Release

Oakland Family Services seeks participants for project on racial disparities in behavioral health treatment

\$225,000 grant from Michigan Health Endowment Fund will help identify barriers to mental health and substance use disorder treatment for Black/African American community

Pontiac, Mich. (March 4, 2022) – Oakland Family Services is kicking off a project that will help bridge the racial gap in behavioral health care in Oakland County with a grant of \$225,000 from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. The grant is part of a four-county effort to identify the reasons Black/African American populations are less likely to receive vital follow-up care after a mental health or substance use disorder crisis that involved a visit to an emergency department.

As part of a one-year discovery and planning process, Oakland Family Services will partner with local community groups, churches, substance use treatment providers and hospitals to engage Black/African American individuals with lived experience in interviews and focus groups. The goal is to identify the spectrum of barriers that the Black/African American community faces in getting post-alcohol/drug or mental health crisis care. The project's name is *Barrier Busting: Uncovering Disparities in Behavioral Health*.

"We know, from extensive Health Fund and other data, the disturbing fact that disparities exist in health care for those in the African American community," said Jaimie Clayton, president and CEO of Oakland Family Services. "These disparities are truly a public health crisis. We are proud to be part of exploring what barriers exist, so we can break them down in order to provide more equitable care for all."

As part of the grant, Oakland Family Services is hiring a dedicated liaison to conduct interviews and collect data. Oakland Community Health Network, Wayne State University, New Birth International Church of Pontiac and other local partners will also assist with the project. Organizations that would like more information about getting involved can contact Natalie Marchione, Oakland Family Services vice president of quality and planning, at (248) 858-7766 ext. 1217 or nmarchione@ofsfamily.org.

"Race and ethnicity should never be a reason for which people are unable to access treatment for mental health or substance use disorders," said OCHN Executive Director and CEO Dana Lasenby. "I am optimistic that through our partnership with Oakland Family Services we can work to ensure equitable services are made available to all vulnerable populations in our community."

The project is recruiting participants for individual interviews and focus groups who:

- Are Black/African American,

- Live in Oakland County,
- Are age 18 or older, and
- Have received mental health or substance use treatment in an emergency department.

Participants who complete an individual interview or focus group will receive a \$50 gift card in exchange for about an hour of their time.

Those interested in participating can fill out a short questionnaire at bit.ly/OFSSurvey or call (248) 285-9817 if they have questions or trouble filling out the questionnaire.

About Oakland Family Services

Oakland Family Services is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) serving the community since 1921 and dedicated to providing individuals and families the opportunity to build brighter futures. The agency's prevention, education and treatment services touch the lives of more than 40,000 individuals throughout southeastern Michigan every year. The agency has offices in Pontiac, Berkley and Walled Lake. For more information, go to www.oaklandfamilyservices.org.

About the Michigan Health Endowment Fund

The Michigan Health Endowment Fund works to improve the health and wellness of Michigan residents and reduce the cost of healthcare, with a special focus on children and seniors. You can find more information about the Health Fund at mihealthfund.org.

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