

Local Law 35 of 2023 Cover Email

DSS/DHS has launched a robust initiative to enhance access to mental health services for parents and children in FWC shelters. This includes the DSS Health Services Office (HSO) developing training and technical assistance tools, meeting with shelter providers, monitoring the program, and eventually where possible, measuring program effectiveness.

A key component of the investment in mental health services for FWC shelters is implementation of Local Law 35. DSS/DHS is pleased to report it has fully launched the first phase of LL35, which requires mental health services at the 30 largest family sites. In the first five months since the enactment of Local Law 35, DHS has implemented universal virtual telehealth services for families and a comprehensive training and technical assistance plan for staff at the 30 highest-volume shelters.

More broadly across the FWC system, DHS is continuing to build the capacity of on-site social workers through innovative training and technical assistance programs and promoting access to universal telehealth services. Notable achievements include:

- Leveraging existing staff and funding to develop a child mental health program within the DSS HSO to provide training, support, and technical assistance to FWC shelters, including those implementing LL35.
- Establishing and expanding partnerships with external organizations to provide direct mental health services and interventions to clients.ⁱ
- Expanding the HSO centralized complex care coordination program to include FWC clients with serious medical conditions, behavioral health conditions, and/or disabilities to support engagement in care and supportive services to help stabilize them and move them along the path to permanent stable housing.
- Partnership with NYC Health and Hospitals ExpressCare, a 24/7 medical and behavioral health urgent care telehealth service, with a dedicated call line and web access for DHS clients and increase awareness of ExpressCare via funding from H+H.
- DHS has received funding to continue the Nurse Call Line serviceⁱⁱ and is currently reviewing proposals for a new vendor. The Nurse Call Line will provide mental health triage services to support connections to care for the FWC system with linkage to 988, H+H ExpressCare and other relevant services

Summary and Next Steps

The New York City DSS/Department of Homeless Services (DHS) is committed to ensuring that all families with children in its care have access to appropriate mental health services. DHS remains dedicated to continuously improving access of mental health services to families with children, and continuing the rollout of LL35 requirements.

ⁱ E.g., Yale's MOMS Stress Management Pilot; Ohel's social-emotional learning project

ⁱⁱ DHS recently concluded a pilot Nurse Call Line project from Spring of 2020 to Spring of 2024. This service provided DHS clients with 24/7 access to a phone line to speak with a registered nurse for medical and behavioral health concerns, at no cost to the client. Nurses offered immediate medical and home care advice, made referrals to community-based care, and facilitated direct connections with telemedicine services, along with free car service to sites of care (urgent care, clinics or hospitals) to approximately 300 clients each month.