



PRO BONO COUNSELING

Your Mental Health Connection

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Pro Bono Counseling Works to Remove Language Access Barriers to Mental Health Care

Pro Bono Counseling's goal is to remove barriers so all Marylanders can access the mental health care they deserve. These include barriers such as social stigma, affordability, racial bias, shortage of resources, and lack of awareness. But one equally important barrier that may not come to mind is language access.

Last year, 478 people contacted Pro Bono Counseling (PBC) for assistance who spoke a language other than English. Fortunately, more than 25% of PBC's active licensed mental health volunteers who donate their counseling services are bilingual. And that number is continuing to grow. In 2022 alone, 29 new bilingual mental health clinicians enrolled to volunteer with the organization.

When someone contacts PBC who does not speak English, staff members first attempt to match them with someone who speaks their primary and preferred language. If that is not possible, the next best practice is for PBC to arrange for a trained interpreter to work with the clinician at no cost to the client.

"PBC works with partner organizations that provide interpreters who are trained to provide precise language communication, are cognizant of mental health terms, and are culturally competent," stated PBC Clinical Director Sherri Bloom.

"Those skills are imperative for a successful counseling session."

While the clinician leads the therapy session, a collaborative relationship is established between the clinician and the interpreter when working with a client. PBC ensures that its volunteer mental health clinicians are well equipped to work with interpreters as well. Volunteers are provided with resources such as guideline materials, continuing education workshops, and peer consultation groups.

"I was always impressed at how the interpreter captured the essence of what I said and communicated it to the client in a meaningful and culturally relevant

way," explained PBC volunteer Rebecca Drury, describing her experience working with an interpreter. "While the interpreter functioned as a translator and a conduit for communication, it was evident that she cared deeply for the client and wanted to ensure that they truly understood the information that was being conveyed."

PBC volunteer clinician Lisa Isenman, LGPC, stated that it was a pleasure working with an interpreter during her counseling sessions. "The interpreter's professionalism, conscientiousness, warmth, humor and genuine empathy made for a stronger rapport with the client and very positive experience for everyone and made a big impact on the client's healing process."

To provide language services at no cost to clients, PBC teams with organizations like Ayuda and Equal Access Language Services. Their trained interpreters participate in both telehealth and in person counseling sessions. In addition to interpretation, these organizations also translate client documents, outreach materials, and PBC's website.



PBC Resource Corner: NAMI Maryland



Since May is designated as Mental Health Awareness month, this month's Resource Corner highlights the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Maryland). NAMI is a nonprofit organization in Maryland that provides mental health resources to communities across the state in addition to advocating to improve the lives of individuals affected by mental health conditions.

The organization offers programs that provide free education and support groups for family caregivers and parents and guardians of individuals aged 22 and younger who are experiencing mental health conditions. NAMI Maryland also offers classes for caregivers and families of military service members and veterans with mental health symptoms.

In addition to educating, supporting, advocating, and listening, NAMI Maryland also leads with public awareness activities and events geared towards fighting the stigma associated with mental illness and helping the nation understand the importance of mental health. The NAMI Helpline is available M-F 10am – 10pm (EST), by calling 800.950.6264 or texting "Helpline" to 62640. More information can also be found at namimd.org. If you are experiencing a crisis, call or text 9-8-8.

Quality Care at No Cost

Mental health counseling for free—so, *what's the catch?* On occasion, when Marylanders contact Pro Bono Counseling (PBC) seeking mental health care, while they are grateful for receiving assistance, they may at times be a bit skeptical that there really won't be a cost for them to pay. Or they may inquire about the quality of the counseling they will be receiving and the qualifications of the therapist.

But once we explain that the organization was established in 1991 to provide mental health care access and that PBC works with licensed mental health professionals who donate their time to provide counseling, they are more assured.

Recently a woman in her 40's reached out to PBC because she was depressed and was having difficulty processing previous trauma. Based upon her request, she was matched with a therapist who she now meets with weekly for counseling.

During a follow-up call with this client to check on her satisfaction and progress, she expressed how much she appreciated her therapist, saying that, "she is at a different skill level than even some of the clinical psychologists I've seen before, she's been very helpful, I cannot overstate that."

She reported that she has seen improvement in her depression symptoms and expressed that this therapy has been "saving [her] life". She went on to share that her therapist is "...wonderful, she's a blessing."

If you are experiencing an issue that can be addressed through therapy, call PBC today at 410.825.1001.

PBC's Gratitude Gathering



MD Lt. Governor
Aruna Miller

Join us for Pro Bono Counseling's Gratitude Gathering on June 8, as we honor and celebrate our volunteers for the impact they make each year to ensure all Marylanders have access to the mental health care they

need and also recognize PBC's generous supporters and community partners.

Scheduled event activities include:

• **Volunteer Recognition** - PBC will honor and recognize milestone service achievements and all volunteers will be eligible for special gratitude gifts.

• **CHAI Radha Pathak Humanitarian Award** - Honoring the memory of Dr. Radha Pathak's benevolent spirit in helping others, this year's award recipient is Maryland Lt. Governor Aruna Miller, for her work prioritizing mental health care.

• **Board Member Recognition** - PBC's outgoing Board President Gil Bliss, LCSW-C, will be acknowledged for his service and the new Board President nominee will be introduced.

• **Community partner and organization supporter appreciation**.

Tickets are limited, so **RSVP** to attend today: <https://tinyurl.com/mr23uy46>.