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**Contact:** Lisa Richardson 213-361-6980

**Email:** [lrichardson@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:lrichardson@bos.lacounty.gov)

**or**

Sharita Moon, 213-309-4136

**Email:** [smoon@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:smoon@bos.lacounty.gov)

## **County Leaders Dedicate Mental Health Urgent Care Center**

Before a standing room only crowd, Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, joined hundreds of county and healthcare leaders to dedicate the new MLK Jr. Mental Health Urgent Care Center on the Martin Luther King Jr. Medical Center Campus to in Willowbrook.

The newly refurbished two-story, 8,000-square-foot facility, which opens September 4, is the latest milestone towards the completion of a wellness community on the MLK Medical Campus that brings preventive and emergency care services to the region.

“The opening of this center is part of a broader countywide drive to expand access to mental health services and substance abuse treatment for all those in need, particularly those at risk of incarceration,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, who spearheaded the effort to bring the urgent care center to the MLK campus. “Facilities like this will be most effective in promoting rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.”

The center is a one-stop shop for families, individuals and law enforcement to bring a person suffering acute distress or an episode related to mental illness. Patients will receive a variety of services including psychiatric evaluation and assessment, crisis intervention, substance abuse counseling and medication support from an on-site team of experts from the county’s departments of mental health, social services, health services and public health. Adults will have a separate wing, divided by gender. Twelve to 17-year-olds will be admitted into a separate wing of the center. While there is an emphasis on serving the indigent and Medi-Cal patients, no one will be turned away.

Although there are 15 medical professionals on staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it is not a sterile, cold and clinical setting. In fact, with its wood laminate floors, soothing yellow walls, cozy sleeping chairs and clean bathrooms, in the recovery area, it is more like a nice family living room where patients can stay for up to 24 hours.

“Twenty-four hours a day, you can bring in your loved one in,” said Luana Murphy, President/CEO of Exodus Recovery and Exodus Foundation for Recovery, which will operate the center. “Services here will be integrated. After they are discharged, no one will be sent to the street. We will have a plan.”

The Urgent Care Center will play an important role in the county’s efforts to redirect mentally ill offenders away from jails, where people with untreated illnesses currently constitute a substantial portion of the population.

“It takes a village and mentally ill citizens are some of our most vulnerable,” said Terri McDonald, assistant sheriff of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. “We can be proud of this step forward in reducing our reliance on jails to deal with our mentally ill.”

The center will be run by Exodus Foundation for Recovery, which has been providing psychiatric services in Southern California since 1989. The urgent care center brings additional medical services to the Martin Luther King Jr. Medical Center Campus, which already include the MLK Outpatient Center and Center for Public Health. The hospital is scheduled to open next year.

“Today, we move one step closer to the MLK Medical Campus we’ve been waiting for,” said Dr. Mark Ghaly, Director of Community and Integrated Programs for the Department of Health Services, noting that the center is a model of recovery and urgent care for mental health centers throughout the region. “It is this image that makes me excited to be here today as we look forward to the services Exodus will provide with its many campus partners for years to come.”

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