



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jennie McCue, SOCCCD Public Affairs, 949.582.4920

Saddleback, Irvine Valley Colleges Awarded Grant to Expand Mental Health Services for Students

February 15, 2018 – The South Orange County Community College District has been awarded a \$350,000 California Community College Mental Health Services Program grant to improve student access to mental health services. The grant was awarded to 15 community college districts by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's office and will enable practitioners of the comprehensive services offered at Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College to expand mental health assistance to a greater number of students.

Mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability in the United States, and college campuses across the nation have seen a significant rise in students experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. A 2017 report of the American College Health Association found that one in four college students has a diagnosable mental illness and 40 percent of students do not seek assistance, which increases the likelihood of dropping out of school, homelessness, and suicide.

The grant funding will enable the colleges to establish *Your Mind Matters: Breaking Down Barriers for Mental Health Wellness*, a comprehensive strategy to bring significant improvement in the colleges' ability to provide meaningful mental health wellness services for students. The initiative will expand programs and strategies to train faculty and staff to reach, screen, and assist students, with particular focus on underserved populations; enhance and formalize relationships with county mental health and community organizations to increase outreach efforts and improve screening and training tools; develop a mental health task force between the two colleges; survey staff who work with underserved and ethnic and culturally diverse groups to identify needs; provide outreach to vulnerable populations such as foster youth, low income, LGBTIQ, and veterans; link students with a wide range of conditions with on- and off-campus resources; and create an advisory committee with student and community members to ensure student needs are addressed.

Timothy Jemal, president of the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees, said, "I am very pleased our district was awarded grant funding to expand critically important mental health services for students. I commend our excellent student health center staff who go above and beyond to ensure the well-being of our students. Their commitment to providing quality mental health services had a large role in securing this grant, which will enable our colleges to offer an even greater spectrum of services for students."

In recent years, both Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College have experienced an increase in demand for mental health services. Saddleback College provided health care services to more than

12,000 students in 2017, a 25 percent increase from 2016. Irvine Valley College served 9,000 students in 2017, with 15 percent of those visits related to mental health issues.

Jeanne Harris-Caldwell, director of student health services at Saddleback College, said, "A recent national survey found that 20 percent of students reported that mental health issues seriously impact their academic performance. Our goal in obtaining this grant is to provide desperately needed mental health wellness support in a safe, confidential, and accessible manner to support our students so they can obtain their educational goals."

Nancy Montgomery, director of the Health and Wellness Center and Veterans Services Center at Irvine Valley College, said, "This grant will have a huge impact in expanding access to students and gives us a significant opportunity to have an open, district-wide conversation by removing the stigma of mental illness and improving suicide awareness, especially for our veteran population."

South Orange County Community College District serves more than 60,000 students per year through our two colleges, Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College. The district serves nearly one million residents and employs more than 3,000 faculty and staff.

###