

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Health Department Launches “I Geh You” Campaign to Address Gen Z Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

The three-month campaign targets Virgin Islanders ages 14 to 26 and equips parents with tools to discuss mental health, recognize warning signs, bridge generational gaps, access local resources and use the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

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The V.I. Department of Health has launched a territory-wide suicide prevention campaign focused on young people ages 14 to 26, citing a growing mental health crisis among teens and young adults and the need to better equip parents, caregivers and communities to support them.

The three-month multimedia campaign, titled “I Geh You,” is being launched in May in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month. It will reach residents across St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John through mainstream media, digital platforms, outdoor advertising and radio.

“We are seeing a growing mental health crisis among our young people in the Virgin Islands,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. “Today’s teens and young adults are navigating pressures that previous generations did not experience at this scale — from constant social media exposure and cyberbullying to academic demands and uncertainty about their future.

“We can also add to that the lasting impacts of recent hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic during critical developmental years.”

According to DOH, the campaign will feature culturally relevant messaging developed specifically for the Virgin Islands Gen Z community. The effort is intended to address the challenges young people face while helping reduce stigma around mental health conversations within Virgin Islands culture.

A central part of the campaign is a new online portal at doh.vi.gov/GenZ, which will serve as a resource hub for young people, parents, caregivers and community members.

The portal will offer conversation starters and communication tools for parents speaking with teens about mental health; strategies for bridging generational gaps that may prevent trusted communication between youth and adults; warning signs and red flags to help identify when “I’m fine” may actually mean “I’m struggling”; and information on local mental health resources available on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.

The portal will also provide guidance on destigmatizing mental health and normalizing help-seeking behavior within the Virgin Islands community, along with information about 988, the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“We want every young person in the Virgin Islands to know that struggling is not a sign of weakness, and that asking for help is an act of courage,” said Renan Steele, Deputy Commissioner for Behavioral Health and Environmental Health. “This campaign is about letting our youth know they are not alone and that support is available right here in our community.”

A key part of the campaign is increasing awareness of 988. Virgin Islanders can call, text or chat 988 to connect with trained crisis counselors at any time. The Department of Health emphasized that individuals do not need to be in crisis to reach out. The service is also available for people experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, emotional distress, or simply needing someone to talk to.

“You do not have to be at your breaking point to reach out for help,” Steele added. “If you are struggling, worried about someone you love, or simply need someone to talk to, 988 is there for you.”

DOH is encouraging all Virgin Islanders, including parents, educators, healthcare providers, community leaders and young people themselves, to engage with the

campaign, visit doh.vi.gov/GenZ for resources, and help spread awareness about mental health support services available throughout the territory.

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