

# Coronavirus has left Bay Area mental health services in crisis

But patients need care now more than ever



SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA – APRIL 7: David Mineta, CEO of Momentum for Mental Health, poses for a photograph at their offices in San Jose, Calif., on Tuesday, April 7, 2020. (Nhat V. Meyer/Bay Area News Group)

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As doctors and nurses around the Bay Area scramble to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, David Mineta is trying to navigate a less-publicized emergency caused by the global pandemic — a burgeoning mental health crisis.

Patients have stopped coming in for their appointments because of the state-wide shelter-in-place order, said Mineta, president and CEO of Momentum for Mental

Health, a Santa Clara County nonprofit that provides mental health care for low-income residents. And that means they aren't getting the help they need during this trying time. It also means Momentum's revenues are way down, and the organization may have to start implementing furloughs soon.

But at the same time, Mineta predicts the need for mental health help is about to explode all over the country, as shelter-in-place orders are lifted and people begin to grapple with the toll the pandemic has taken on their lives. When that happens, Mineta fears that without help from the county and the state, he and other providers won't have the capacity to meet the increased need.

Mineta sat down with this news organization (by phone — to practice social distancing) to talk about the crisis his industry is facing. This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

**Q How is the coronavirus crisis affecting the Bay Area's mental health facilities?**

**A** In general, like many other parts of the healthcare system, patients and clients are not coming in for appointments, canceling appointments that they would normally have, and as a result, the agencies, institutions, hospitals are not able to bill what they would normally bill. We think for the month of March we were probably at about 50% of normal billed services. And that's revenue. So that revenue then pays for salaries, benefits and keeping the lights on and leases and rent. The question is how long will that go on?

**Q How is that impacting your ability to help patients?** **A** It adds to the worry and concern of the staff. In order for us to be able to provide services, our staff have to be safe and healthy as well. And folks are either worried about infection, or if we have enough supplies. All the personal protective equipment that you hear about for shortages in the hospital, those are as much of an issue for us.

**Q Do you have enough personal protective equipment?** **A** We had some. After the fires it occurred to us that man, we need to have some N95 masks at all times. So we had a store of those N95 masks. Nothing close to what we needed for this. We've been trying to find more masks, gowns, gloves. We need all the PPE as well — it's just that when you think of PPE, you think of the hospitals first.

**Q Hospitals are getting federal and state funding to handle a surge of COVID patients and shipments of PPE. Have mental health facilities received any of those resources?** **A** Not that I'm aware of. Not with the other providers that I'm talking to. We've been dealing with this for a while — we've been looking for PPE since probably the first or second week of February. We've gotten some in and then the county on the 3rd sent some over, which is helpful.

**Q Are you worried your recent revenue loss will force Momentum to do furloughs or layoffs or cut patient services?** A I think it's prudent for us to be planning for furloughs. Hopefully they're short-term.

**Q As this crisis drags out, are you worried that people in the Bay Area are not going to get the mental health care they need?** A Yes. The worry is that even now as people are sheltering in place, that their conditions are possibly getting more acute as they sit home. And that their need for additional, higher-level care services could be increasing. So that's why we've been trying to keep the staff in, or remote, and calling people to check-in and see how they're doing.

**Q Are you trying to provide some of your services virtually, or over the phone?** A If we can. The hard part is that we work with a low-income population. They have to qualify by income. So for many folks, if you don't have access to the internet, if you don't have a cell phone, then you're limited.

**Q That must make it particularly hard for the homeless, who might not have access to those resources.** A That's exactly the issue. So in the midst of this really community-wide anxiety, stress, fear, folks who don't have connections or ability to connect remotely are really, really at a disadvantage. And trying to figure out solutions for that has been difficult as well. It makes the income gap and the disparity, or haves and have-nots — it just makes it so much clearer now.

**Q How are your staffing levels? Are workers calling out sick?** A The first thing that got us was when the schools closed. We had dozens of staff that had childcare issues and had to stay home. And then we have staff who either have health conditions or are a certain age, and that's another group of staff. And there were other staff who just worried about infection. We have an injection clinic — certain (psychiatric) medications you can give via a shot — but you can't do that remotely. You have to do that in person. For a few days, we weren't able to staff the injection clinic.

**Q What do we need to do to solve these problems and make sure mental health facilities can meet their patients' needs?** A I think the first step is for all people just to consider that the physical effects from this pandemic are going to be at a certain level, but the psychological effects — it affects everyone. I don't have a mental health condition or a substance use disorder, and yet I find that my own psychological well being has been greatly affected by this.

It crosses all age boundaries, it crosses all ethnicities, it crosses all income levels. So number-one, I just want people to stop and think about that.

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## David Mineta

Title: President and CEO of Momentum for Mental Health

Home: San Jose

Family: Wife and two kids — his daughter is a senior in high school, and his son is a freshman

Age: 56

Education: UC Berkeley for undergrad, San Jose State for a masters in social work

Prior job: Worked for President Barack Obama’s administration in the Office of National Drug Control Policy

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### Five facts about David Mineta

1. He attended T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia — the school where the true events that inspired the “Remember the Titans” movie took place.
2. His father, Norman Y. Mineta, was the Secretary of Transportation under President George W. Bush — and Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport is named after him.
3. David Mineta used to be a DJ. He once worked a “raucous” house party for Mississippi Congressman Mike Espy, which he called the highlight of his DJ career.
4. His family has a 5-year-old cockapoo named Posey, after Buster Posey.
5. Mineta is an American Leadership Forum Senior Fellow, Class XXXIII.



**Marisa Kendall** | Housing reporter Marisa Kendall covers homelessness as part of the Bay Area News Group’s housing team. She previously covered litigation for The Recorder in San Francisco, and started her career reporting on crime and breaking news for The News-Press in Southwest Florida.

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