

Information for Faith-Based and Community Leaders

Introduction

On June 3, 2013, President Obama convened a National Conference on Mental Health at the White House. Dozens of commitments by organizations representing media, educators, health care providers, faith communities, and foundations to increase understanding and awareness of mental health were announced at the conference.

Increasing awareness of mental health issues and making it easier for people to seek help will take partners working together. Faith and community leaders can play a significant role in helping to educate individuals and families about mental health.

What is mental health?

Mental health is an essential part of overall health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. A person's mental health includes how they handle stress, manage emotions, relate to other people, make decisions, and perceive the world and their sense of purpose in life.ⁱ

Mental health problems affect virtually all communities in our country. Approximately one in five Americans over age 18 will experience a mental health problem this year.ⁱⁱ There are 45 million adults with any mental illness over the age of 18 in the United Statesⁱⁱⁱ and currently suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year-olds.^{iv} However, we know that people can and do recover from mental health problems.

Important Information for Faith and Community Leaders

By taking part in this important discussion about mental health, faith and community leaders can help individuals and families in need by lifting up messages of support and providing information on how to access services if necessary.

- When individuals and families face mental health problems, many turn to trusted friends and communities. As leaders and members of congregations, and faith-based and other community organizations, your voices add great value to efforts to reduce negative attitudes about mental health conditions and those who experience them.
- Faith and other neighborhood leaders are often first responders when an individual or family faces a mental health challenge or when a community experiences a traumatic event. Knowing how to respond to these events can make a huge difference in how the individual and community copes and heals.

- Negative attitudes and discrimination of people with mental illnesses can impede recovery.^v Religious and civic leaders can help lessen negative attitudes, fear, and discrimination against people with mental illnesses by creating a safe and supportive environment where people can openly talk about mental health issues. Empathy and active listening can help build relationships and support recovery for people living with mental illnesses.
- Community connectedness and support, like that found in faith-based and other neighborhood organizations, are important to the long-term recovery of people living with mental illnesses.^{vi}
- Your understanding of behavioral health and the many pathways to recovery can help people achieve their full potential.

What Can Faith and Community Leaders Do To Become Part of Community Conversations About Mental Health?

If they chose to do so, faith and other community leaders can have a significant role in increasing understanding and awareness of mental health, encouraging individuals experiencing mental health problems to seek help, and helping to build resilience and well-being in individuals and communities.

These leaders can help by taking steps such as:

- Identifying opportunities to discuss the importance of mental health, facts about mental illness, and the role that the religious and other community organizations can play in supporting individuals living with mental illnesses and encouraging them to seek help.
- Organizing additional meetings, dinners, or other gatherings for members of your congregation or community to have conversations about mental health.
- Creating a welcoming, supportive, safe and non-judgmental environment to address mental health issues within the congregation and in community settings.
 - Let people know it is okay to talk about mental health.
 - Talk about mental health with an approach that supports prevention, treatment and recovery.
 - Encourage people experiencing mental health problems – and their families – to seek help and assist them in finding help when needed.
 - Promote positive mental health through fellowship.
 - Foster opportunities to build connections with individuals and families dealing with mental health challenges through a spirit of trust and acceptance.

- Recognize and support individuals with mental illnesses regardless of whether they are doing well or needing additional assistance.
- Consider offering your organization's meeting spaces for community conversations and support groups focused on addressing mental health issues.
- Planning and facilitating a community conversation using SAMHSA's *Toolkit for Community Conversations About Mental Health*. The toolkit provides information about how to plan a community conversation, how to guide these discussions, and includes information about mental health issues to use during the discussion.
- Sharing the *Toolkit for Community Conversations About Mental Health* with your colleagues and leaders in other organizations.
- Developing relationships with local mental health service providers and helping to direct individuals and families in need to available services and supports in the community.
- Inviting local experts on mental health issues to speak at community gatherings and educational hours.
- Committing to ongoing involvement and outreach.

If you or someone in your community is looking for experts to serve as speakers or to link to other local services, please visit MentalHealth.gov for a list of partner organizations that can serve as a resource.

Together we can help improve America's health and the health of our families and communities.

For more resources visit www.MentalHealth.gov and www.SAMHSA.gov.

Where can I find help for myself, a congregation member, a family member, or a friend?

If the situation is potentially life-threatening, get immediate emergency assistance by calling **911**, available 24 hours a day.

- If you or someone you know are suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)**. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- To find help in your community, contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) **Treatment Referral Line at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)** available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST.
- You can also access the **Treatment Locator** online by visiting www.SAMHSA.gov or www.MentalHealth.gov.

-
- ⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1999). *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.
- ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings* (NSDUH Series, H-45, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 12-4725). Rockville, MD. Retrieved from http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10MH_Findings/2k10MHResults.htm
- ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings* (NSDUH Series, H-45, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 12-4725). Rockville, MD. Retrieved from http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10MH_Findings/2k10MHResults.htm
- ^{iv} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)* [online]. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/10LCID_All_Deaths_By_Age_Group_2010-a.pdf
- ^v Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, National Institute of Mental Health, & The Carter Center Mental Health Program. (2012). *Attitudes Toward Mental Illness: Results from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ^{vi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. (2011). *National Prevention Strategy*. Washington, DC: National Prevention Council. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/prevention/strategy/report.pdf>.

Everyone Can Play a Role in the Conversation about Mental Health

On June 3, 2013, President Obama convened a National Conference on Mental Health at the White House. Dozens of organizations representing media, educators, health care providers, faith communities, and foundations committed to take steps to increase understanding and awareness of mental health.

Increasing awareness of mental health issues and making it easier for people to seek help will take partners working together. Faith and community leaders can play a significant role in helping to educate individuals and families about mental health.

Did you know?

- Mental health issues affect *all members* of society in some way, shape, or form. It is estimated that one in five Americans over age 18 will experience a mental health problem this year.ⁱ
- It is estimated that 6-12 percent of transition-age youth and young adults struggle with a serious mental health condition (2.4-5 million individuals).ⁱⁱ
- Of children and youth in need of mental health services, 75-80 percent of these youth do not receive services.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Mental health involves how a person handles stress, relates to other people, manages emotions, makes decisions, and perceives the world and their sense of purpose in life.^{iv}
- Mental health is essential to the overall health and well-being.
- Misunderstandings about mental health can lead to negative attitudes that prevent people with mental illness from being accepted and supported, and can make it harder for them and their families to get help and lead productive lives in their communities.
- People can and do recover from mental health problems.

Where can I find information about mental health?

The MentalHealth.gov website provides information about mental health, signs and symptoms of mental illness, and how to talk about mental health issues. You can also find more information about how you can help your friends and loved ones to access treatment and support if needed.

Where can I find help for myself, a family member, or a friend?

If the situation is potentially life-threatening, get immediate emergency assistance by calling **911**, available 24 hours a day.

- If you or someone you know are suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)**. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- To find help in your community, contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) **Treatment Referral Line at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)** available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST.
- You can also access the **Treatment Locator** online by visiting www.SAMHSA.gov or www.mentalhealth.gov.

What can my community and I do to support individuals experiencing mental health problems?

Faith-based and neighborhood organizations play a significant role in the health and well-being of communities. Trusted and supportive relationships—such as family, long-term friendships, and connections to clergy, religious and other, community organizations—are important to building resilience and well-being.^v

Here's how you can help:

1. Learn the basic signs of mental illnesses and other facts about mental health. Understand that people can and do recover from mental health challenges and that help is available and effective.
2. Connect individuals and families within your community to mental health treatment and support if they or a loved one needs help.
3. Build a safe and supportive environment in your congregation or civic organization where people can openly talk about mental health issues.
4. Promote awareness by educating your congregations and communities about mental health issues through educational forums and other opportunities. You can invite local mental health experts – including those who have experienced mental illness – to speak with your congregation or at community gatherings.

If you or someone in your community is looking for experts to serve as speakers or to link to other local services, please visit MentalHealth.gov for a list of partner organizations that can serve as a resource.

Together we can help improve America's health and the health of our families and communities.

For more resources visit www.MentalHealth.gov and www.SAMHSA.gov.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings* (NSDUH Series, H-45, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 12-4725). Rockville, MD.

Retrieved from http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10MH_Findings/2k10MHRResults.htm

ⁱⁱ Davis, M., & Vander Stoep, A. (1997). The transition to adulthood for youth who have serious emotional disturbance: Developmental Transition and young adult outcomes. *Journal of Mental Health Administration*, 24(4), 400-426.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kataoka, S., Zhang, L., & Wells, K. (2002). Unmet needs for mental health care among U.S. children: Variation by ethnicity and insurance status. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159(9), 1548-1555

^{iv} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1999). *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services; National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.

^v U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. (2011). *National Prevention Strategy*. Washington, DC: National Prevention Council. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/prevention/strategy/report.pdf>