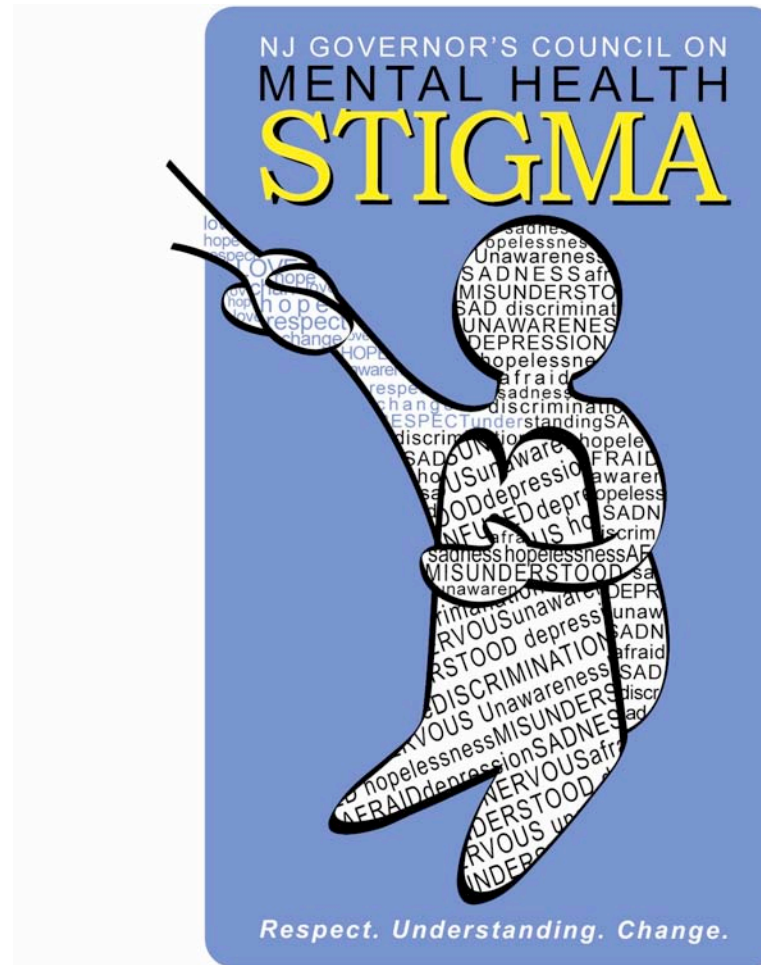


The New Jersey Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma



www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil

MISSION

The mission of the Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma is to combat mental health stigma as a top priority in New Jersey's effort to create a better mental health system. Through outreach and education, the Council will send a message that mental health stigma must no longer be tolerated

The issue of mental health stigma is one whose time has come and one that is impacting our lives on local, national and global levels. The NJ Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma will champion this issue and work steadfastly to raise awareness and promote respect, understanding and change.

The campaign to educate and enlighten the public about mental health stigma is paramount to our efforts. Mental illness does not discriminate, but people do. When we discriminate against those with mental illness we are discriminating against our mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, friends and neighbors. Embracing mental health and recognizing the crucial role it plays in our whole health picture will enrich and strengthen the communities in which we live.

“A Community Effort”

“ If we address mental illness as a community...as a village, we can embark on an age of enlightenment in mental health.”

The Individual

Stigma isolates individuals living with mental illness. Until mental health takes its proper place in our whole health dynamic, those living with mental illness will continue to remain disenfranchised.

The fact is that mental illnesses can be treated and many of those diagnosed recover completely. For those who think that they or someone they care about has a mental illness, there are resources and avenues for treatment.

Family and Friends

You are not alone. Family and friends often take a back seat to the illness, which leaves them feeling helpless and forgotten. Stigma prevents them from talking about the illness to other family members, friends, colleagues, and clergy. When loved ones embrace and share their experiences, they strengthen their coping mechanisms. There are a multitude of resources that offer support and services for family and friends in communities all across New Jersey.

Culture and Religion

Houses of worship are a source of shelter and comfort for so many. However, even in the faith based community, the stigma of mental illness can prevent individuals and families from getting the shelter and comfort they so desperately need. It is vital that mental illness be recognized as a medical issue and be treated as such. It is also important to acknowledge the power of faith and tradition in cultural and religious communities. When religious and cultural leaders combine these philosophies to address the issue of mental illness, they provide a powerful support system for the communities they serve.

Education

Collaboration with parents is a vital part of the student-teacher relationship. Sometimes parents are unable to recognize mental illness in their own children. Sometimes they do recognize it but are afraid to address it for fear of stigma. When parents, teachers, and administrators work together in addressing the mental health of a student, everybody wins. When accommodations are made for students with mental illness, students are given the chance to excel and to flourish. With all supports systems working in harmony, teachers can function positively in the class environment, parents feel supported in knowing that their children are getting what they need, and most importantly, students are not isolated by their illness. Instead, these young people are given the opportunity they deserve, so that they can lay the foundation for living their lives to the fullest potential.

Employment

Those seeking employment, as well as those already employed, face serious mental health stigma. Research posted by the *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* suggests that employers are less likely to hire persons who are labeled mentally ill. Many individuals believe that revealing a criminal record to an employer is less deleterious than revealing a mental illness. This perception is unacceptable and one born out of ignorance and misunderstanding. All individuals in the workplace experience stress factors that can impact mental health and the dollar amount lost as a result of disability is staggering. By recognizing this fact, we can incorporate good mental health into workplace culture at all levels and acknowledge its importance. This affords us the opportunity to create an environment that sustains and inspires productivity, and harnesses all the talents and capabilities of individuals in wellness and recovery.

Healthcare and Insurance

The time has come for there to be parity for mental health

care. It was clearly a breakthrough when the *first-ever* Surgeon General's report on mental illness was released in 1999. However, it speaks volumes about the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness when one realizes that the vital role of mental health in all our lives was not officially acknowledged until the eve of the 21st century. The integration of primary and mental health care will be key to wellness and recovery.

The issue of health care and insurance in our nation is at a tipping point and in dire need of reevaluation. It will likely take years before quality health care coverage for all Americans becomes a reality. In the interim, mental health care must take its rightful place in the healthcare continuum. Statistics showing the remarkable prevalence of mental illness indicate that the mental health of our citizens can no longer be ignored or in any way misrepresented. The consequences of ignoring this issue will result in financial and human cost infinitely greater than any cost associated with adoption of parity.

Housing

If you are being treated for a mental illness, you are entitled to live a quality existence with dignity as you move through recovery process. The stigma of mental illness - particularly self stigma - leaves individuals living with mental illness feeling powerless, causing them to settle for less than they deserve. This is unacceptable.

The NIMBY point of view is an unfortunate outgrowth of inaccurate media portrayals of and lack of knowledge about individuals living with mental illness. When we read about the emotionally charged protests against supportive housing in our neighborhoods we hear shocking statements like "send them to Mars." It is important to remember that the term "them" in actuality represents our neighbors, our friends and our families.

Helen Keller, a woman who overcame overwhelming social stigma said, "The highest result of education is tolerance." The public is bombarded by falsehoods and sensationalism. What is almost never publicized is the fact that the vast majority of those in recovery from mental illness rejoin their communities with great success. They have genial relationships with their neighbors, live productive lives and positively contribute to their communities.

Law Enforcement

By reducing stigma and raising mental health awareness through respect understanding and change, both law enforcement and the community they serve will benefit.

The stress of a career in law enforcement can be intense. Today's police force deals with issues beyond the neighborhood, including but not limited to the threat of global terrorism hitting home, raising stress levels to new highs. There is no way to predict which officers will develop mental illness, particularly when it comes to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - whose onset is often subtle in nature and can present months after a traumatic event. When these symptoms remain unchecked, the disorder can spiral, sometimes leading to suicidality. Awareness and early treatment of this and other disorders can make a profound impact on the health of the officer, and in some instances, mean the difference between life and death.

Recognizing and understanding symptoms is vital when relating to those in the community living with mental illness. In some cases, an individual might misunderstand or be unable to follow police orders because of symptoms that might be presenting. When an officer is not trained to recognize mental illness, he or she might misinterpret symptoms and respond inappropriately. A better understanding can result in preventing an individual from facing unnecessary aggression and incarceration. When law enforcement partners with the mental health community for education and training, they can combat stigma and save lives.

Legislation and Advocacy

After years of unwavering dedication, progress is being made. However, it is crucial that focus on legislation and advocacy remains constant. According to the World Health Organization's *Mental Health Policy and Service Guidance Package*, "Mental health legislation is essential for complementing and reinforcing mental health policy and providing a legal framework for meeting its goals. Such legislation can protect human rights, enhance the quality of mental health services and promote the integration of persons with mental disorders into communities. These goals are an integral part of national mental health policies."

Mental illness is a public health and human rights issue. We stand at the threshold of a new era in mental health and hold in our hands the power to enact historic change. We owe it to ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and colleagues, and our communities to eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness and fully recognize the vital role of mental health in all our lives.

Media and Entertainment Industry

Media and the entertainment industry play an enormous role in perpetuating stigma. There has been much progress in building sensitivity in regard to many groups that have suffered the indignity of ugly stereotypes but somehow, this progress has not touched the mental health community. Those living with mental illness sometimes seem exempt from the sensitivity and compassion that writers, journalists, filmmakers, and television producers afford those living with other illnesses such as cancer and diabetes.

Opinions are shaped by what we read in newspapers, what we hear on the radio, and what we see on television and in the movies. In a 1990 survey by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, respondents indicated that their primary source of knowledge about mental illness was the mass media. But these images are rarely accurate. A report by Otto Wahl states that more than 70% of characters with mental illnesses in prime-time television drama are portrayed as violent, and more than one fifth are shown as killers when in actuality, studies have shown that only a minuscule percentage of the violence in American society can be attributed to people who have mental illnesses.

Military and Veterans Affairs

The issue of mental illness in the military has clearly reached a critical juncture. Troops presently serving in Iraq are suffering from combat related mental illness at a staggering rate, and the projected numbers foretell a mental health care crisis for veterans. Vietnam, Korean, and World War II Veterans have been re-traumatized, with many of them never having received much needed mental health treatment. Yet, because of the strong mental health stigma and the related career consequences that exist in the military, there continues to be an unspoken rule to conceal mental illness and "buck-up."

Mental health stigma leads to tragic results for Veterans, manifesting in shattered lives and in too many instances, suicide. These brave Americans have laid their lives on the line in service to their country. Until stigma is addressed and the reality of the mental health needs of Veterans is fully recognized, our returning troops and veterans from wars past will continue to suffer - needlessly.

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Please join us in our effort to raise mental health awareness
and fight the discrimination associated with mental
illness through respect, understanding, and change

For more information please visit:

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