



Mental Health Awareness Month

May 2018

The District of Columbia Office of Disability Rights (ODR) recognizes May 2018 as Mental Health Awareness Month. We aim to open the conversation and educate the public and advocates surrounding mental health and continue to fight stigma, attitudes and misconceptions associated with it.

Did you know that it is estimated that 1 in 5 Americans (43.8 million people) experience some type of mental health condition in any given year¹. That means that a majority of people experience some type of mental health at least once in their lifetime. It may be you, your neighbor, your family, your friends, and or your co-workers. No one person is immune to mental health conditions as it can affect anyone regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability or economic status. Even though mental health is so common there is still stigma attached to it that creates barriers to those in need of help and treatment by creating shame, fear, judgment, rejection, discrimination and bullying. Only 41% of adults in the U.S. with a mental health condition received mental health services. For African Americans and Hispanic Americans the use of mental health services is at about one-half the rate of Caucasian Americans while Asian Americans are at about one-third the rate². The statistics show that those who need support are not necessarily receiving it. With proper support, people with mental health conditions can live full and productive lives.

Mental health is more often than not correlated with suicide. There is no single cause that leads to suicide. Some risk factors that may increase the chance of suicide can include mental health conditions, environmental factors such as bullying and stressful life events, and a family history of suicide, neglect, abuse, trauma, and substance abuse. Often, those who experience suicidal ideations and tendencies may experience hopelessness and despair and feel that there is no way out. Unfortunately, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. and the 3rd leading cause of death for those aged 10 to 14 and the 2nd leading cause of death for those aged 15-24³. Together we can work to change these statistics by increasing access to mental health services, removing stigmas, and openly discussing what it means to live with mental health.

We encourage you to join us in celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month not just in May but all year long to remove stigmas, have open conversations about mental health, and reduce the rate of suicide in DC and across the U.S. and world. Follow #MentalHealth #KeepTalkingMH #CureStigma to follow updates and events celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month.

¹ Any Mental Illness (AMI) Among Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2015, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-mental-illness-ami-among-adults.shtml>

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Racial/Ethnic Differences in Mental Health Service Use among Adults*. HHS Publication No. SMA-15-4906. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015. Retrieved July 2017, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/MHServicesUseAmongAdults/MHS>

³ "10 Leading Causes of Death By Age Group, United States, 2015" (2015). Retrieved June 1, 2017, from https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading-causes_of_death_age_group_2015_1050w740h.gif



What you can do to help remove stigma and reduce the rate of suicide:

- Let people know you're willing to talk and listen and to encourage them to seek help
- Do not be patronizing or judgmental such as saying things like; "things could be worse"
- If a person talks about killing themselves, having no reason to live, and or being a burden to others, be sensitive but ask direct questions (Asking questions won't push someone into harming themselves but it will offer an opportunity for them to talk about their feelings and may reduce the risk of acting on these feelings):
 - How are you coping?
 - Have you thought about this before?
 - Have you thought about how or when you would do this?
 - Do you have access to weapons or things that can be used to harm yourself?
 - Encourage them to call the suicide hotline number 1-800-273-8255 or the DC Access Help Line 1-888-793-4357
- Take a Mental Health First Aid training, a certification course, that teaches a five-step action plan that helps to identify interventions and secure appropriate care for an individual
- If someone is about to attempt suicide or is in the process of trying to do not leave the person alone and if safe to do so take them to the nearest emergency room or call 911

Local Resources:

- **The DC Department of Behavioral Health** offers a range of services including substance abuse prevention education and services, recovery support services, homeless services for those with a mental health condition or who are experiencing substance abuse, and emergency psychiatric services. They also offer the Access HelpLine: 1(888)7WE-HELP or 1-888-793-4357 where individuals can call to get emergency psychiatric care, help with problem solving, and to find out what services are available. www.dbh.dc.gov
- **The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)** is a voluntary health organization dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. You can join their **local chapter in DC** and learn more about local events and programs. www.afsp.org
- **Mary's Center** is a community health center that provides access to health care services regardless of participant's ability to pay. www.maryscenter.org
- **So Other Might Eat (SOME)** is an interfaith, community-based organizations that supports homeless women and men in DC and provides several inpatient and outpatient programs for mental health. www.some.org
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness** is a grassroots mental health organization that provides educational programs, advocacy toward public policy, hosts public awareness events and activities, and offers a toll-free Helpline where any individual can call and receive free referrals, information and support. www.nami.org