MENTAL ILLNESS AND OUR COMMUNITY — HOW THE FAITH COMMUNITY CAN HELP REDUCE STIGMA

More than half of US adults living with any mental illness do not receive treatment.

Religious or spiritual involvement may help promote healthy living and mental health in a number of ways, as it may:

- Increase social support and sense of belonging
- Promote personal development towards greater meaning in life
- Provide additional support to cope with challenges
- Reduce negative thoughts and experiences

It is likely that people in our community deal with mental health and substance use challenges. For those struggling with mental illness, accessing and receiving culturally appropriate and quality care can be difficult. **It is important to help guide those seeking mental health care to a healthcare professional.**

The faith community can be a source of strength and support for adults living with mental illness, along with caregivers and family, to help guide those seeking mental health care in our community to a healthcare professional.

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

— Galatians 6:9
WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH EQUITY IMPORTANT?

• Stigma keeps people from seeking professional help or speaking with community leaders, like their pastor or other members of their church
• We must create a judgment-free environment that will allow members, friends, and the community to feel accepted and welcome
• Let’s foster a community where people can get care easily

Our goal is to become a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) congregation for mental health.

PRACTICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Welcome:

• Show that mental health is accepted
• Welcome people by their name and do not define individuals by diagnosis or label people with illness
• Lead with an open mind and compassion

Include:

• Actively include people with lived experience of mental illness in the community, like in the work of the Mental Health Ministry
• Use inclusive language about mental health conditions

Support:

• Create a community mental health resource list to share with members, friends, and visitors
• Start a Spiritual Support Group for Mental Health and create a safe place to share stories, including resources for where to go
• Offer to pray with them and for them

Engage:

• Promote mental health with physical health and join in advocacy for the larger community and your congregation

The Community Health Equity Alliance seeks to advance solutions to mental health care that are scalable, sustainable, and increase opportunity for equitable impact.

PLAN

• Normalize mental health challenges by teaching individuals that they are not alone
• Include God in recovery by expressing that God loves all, regardless of their state of mental, physical, and spiritual health
• Struggling with mental health does not mean that you do not have faith
• Establish a mental health environment, involving community and church leadership, where no one is stigmatized, ostracized, or turned away

GENERAL RESOURCES

Mental Health America: https://www.mhanational.org/
National Alliance on Mental Illness: https://www.nami.org/Home
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: https://www.samhsa.gov/
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/features/how-right-now.htm
HRSA Data Warehouse: https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov

National Suicide Prevention 24-hour Lifeline: 988 or 800-273-8255
National Mental Health Hotline: 866-903-3787
NAMI Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) (M - F, 10am-10pm ET) or helpline@nami.org

MENTAL HEALTH FACTS

While 13% of the US population identifies as Black, only 2% of psychiatrists identify as Black. Increasing the availability of culturally representative care is an important way to improve outcomes.