

# MEDIA TOOLKIT



## HOW MEDIA CAN SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS.

As a member of the media, you have an important role in helping educate the public about issues relating to mental health and substance abuse.

Mental health is just that—health. So, a person with a mental illness should be depicted no differently than someone with a physical disease such as cancer, diabetes, or even the common cold. Alcohol and drug addictions are complex diseases that often require both medical treatment and behavioral therapy.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO.** As you cover events or write stories for your publication, station, or organization, please keep in mind the following facts.

- Mental illness **can happen to anyone.**
- You probably **know someone with a mental illness** and don't even realize it.
- Mental illnesses are surprisingly common; they affect **almost every family in America.**
- About **1 in 4 adult/adolescent Americans** are living with a diagnosable mental health condition.
- If someone has a mental illness, that **doesn't mean he or she is incompetent, lazy, unpredictable, a criminal, or violent.**
- In fact, individuals with mental health challenges are **12 times more likely to be victims of crime** rather than perpetrators.
- 50% of all mental illness appears **before age 14** and 75% before age 24.
- 80% of youth with severe depression **receive no or insufficient treatment.**
- Despite effective treatments, there are **long delays – sometimes decades** – between the first onset of symptoms and when people seek and receive treatment.

**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT.** Far too frequently, news stories, TV shows, movies, and other media cast mental illness in a negative light—spreading damaging stereotypes and outdated misconceptions in the process. The result is stigma and discrimination against those dealing with mental health issues and substance abuse, which prevents individuals from getting the support they need. Even though virtually all mental health conditions are treatable, only 40% of people struggling with these issues seek professional assistance.

We are incarcerating young people with mental illnesses, some **as young as 8 years old**, rather than identifying their conditions early and intervening with appropriate treatment.

At least **half of the children and youth** in the child welfare system have mental health problems; 85% of these children receive no services.

More than 50% of students with untreated emotional behavioral disorders **drop out of high school**; of those who do remain in school, only 42% graduate with a high school diploma.

- When children with untreated mental disorders become adults, they use more health care services and **incur higher health care costs** than other adults.
- Left untreated, **childhood disorders are likely to persist** and lead to a downward spiral of school failure, limited or non-existent employment opportunities, and poverty in adulthood. No other illness harms so many children so seriously.
- Suicide is the **second-leading cause of death** for people ages 15-24 (after accidents and homicide).
- In the Buffalo Public Schools, nearly 30% of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless to the point where it **interfered with their daily activities**, and 14% thought seriously about dying by suicide.
- More than 90% of young people who die by suicide were suffering from depression or some **other diagnosable and treatable mental illness** at the time of their death.
- A teenager or young adult with depression or addiction is **not going through a phase** that will go away on its own.
- Addiction is a **chronic, often relapsing brain disease** that causes compulsive alcohol or drug seeking and use.
- Of children ages nine to 17, **21% have a diagnosable mental health or addictive disorder** that causes at least minimal impairment.

- **No single factor** can predict whether a person will become addicted to drugs or alcohol. Risk for addiction is influenced by a combination of factors that include individual biology, social environment, and age or stage of development.

**! MORE TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS DIE FROM SUICIDE THAN FROM CANCER, HEART DISEASE, AIDS, BIRTH DEFECTS, STROKE, PNEUMONIA, INFLUENZA, AND CHRONIC LUNG DISEASE COMBINED.**

- Early identification and treatment **prevents the loss of critical developmental years** that cannot be recovered and helps young people avoid years of unnecessary suffering.
- Empirically supported **prevention and early intervention strategies** support children and youth resiliency and ability to succeed.

## WORKING TOGETHER TO OVERCOME STIGMA

We understand that mental health and substance abuse are complex issues, and that members of the media are not experts in this area. If you have any questions about how to cover mental health and addiction issues, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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