

about us

OpenMindsOpenDoors is a Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania initiative, made possible through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, aimed at ending discrimination against people with mental illnesses. **People with mental illnesses have the same needs – and the same rights – as everyone else.**

As with many other illnesses, individuals who face the challenge of mental illness can recover, lead productive lives, and make valuable contributions to society.

OpenMindsOpenDoors develops information and materials to educate about mental illnesses and recovery, foster community inclusion, and advocate for the legal rights of people living with mental health problems.

"I still get symptoms. I still have times I go into depression, but I'm so much better. Recovery is a process."

*Lyn, public policy consultant
Lives with clinical depression*

"Through my illnesses, I've found a way to help others, and a way to love myself again. I'm happier than I've ever been before in my life. People with mental illness CAN recover, CAN learn to cope, and CAN be functional members of society. I'm living proof of it."

*Edna, single mother, peer specialist
Lives with clinical depression, OCD, generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder*

"I'm no longer ashamed of the fact that I need help. I want to shout it from the rooftops... Every day, someone is promoting awareness for something. Why does mental illness have to be so secretive? With serenity, courage, and wisdom, we will overcome the stigma."

*Morgan, wife, mother, business owner
Lives with OCD and anxiety disorder*

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A campaign of the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania

ending
discrimination
against people with
mental illnesses.

MHA PA
Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania
An Affiliate of Mental Health America

what to know...

People Living with Mental Illness Have the Same Needs as Everyone Else.

Approximately 57.7 million – one-in-four – people in the United States live with mental illness of some sort. To live healthy, fulfilled lives, they have the same needs as everyone else: food, affordable and decent housing, meaningful work, healthcare coverage, access to a good education, and acceptance by family and peers. Yet, stigma associated with mental illness and discrimination against people living with it often prevent their needs from being met. According to a U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health, "Stigma leads people to avoid socializing, employing, or living near persons who have a mental disorder."

People with Mental Illness Experience Recovery.

"Recovery" means different things to different people. For some, recovery is being able to hold down a job. For others, it means working to personal capacity, returning to school, or maintaining close relationships with family and friends. People with mental illness have access to more treatments than ever before in history, including medication, rehabilitation, psychotherapy, group therapy, self-help, or a combination of any of these. Whether recovery comes from medication, traditional therapy, alternative treatments, or even prayer, one common theme is that individuals feel responsible for their lives.

Discrimination Against People Who Have Mental Illness Keeps Them from Seeking Help.

Mental and physical health are important to the overall well-being of individuals and societies. Yet, of the one-in-four people living with a mental illness, fewer than half with serious illnesses seek treatment; and those who do expend considerable effort to keep their treatment a secret. Many have experienced discrimination in school, in housing situations, in the community, and at work. Fear of disclosure, rejection by friends, and discrimination are among the reasons they remain silent, instead of reaching out for help.

"We all deserve a life free of stigma and its devastating effects on our professional and personal lives."

Barbara, French scholar, Lives with bipolar depression

People Who Have Mental Illness Make Valuable Contributions to Society.

Teachers. Doctors. Politicians. Lawyers. Parents. Musicians. Actors. Business owners. Scientists. Artists. People living with mental illnesses work in all professions and make invaluable and endless contributions to our lives and communities. They are our friends, family, neighbors, and the people we interact with every day. Yet, only 42% of Americans believe people living with a mental illness can be as successful at work as others. Studies, however, indicate no differences when comparing the productivity of people with mental health problems to that of other employees. Stigma and discrimination, nevertheless, often keep them from applying for or being offered employment, despite their qualifications for a job. Overcoming the stigma associated with a mental illness, seeking and getting treatment, and being part of a support network enable people to reclaim their lives, enjoy meaningful careers, and continue to make valuable contributions to society.

Discrimination Against People Who Have Mental Illness Violates Their Basic Human Rights.

Twenty years after passage of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990, negative and harmful attitudes against people living with mental illnesses remain strong. Despite the provisions of the Act and other civil rights laws, people with mental illnesses continue to face discrimination in the workplace, at school, and in their communities. Breaking down the stigma of mental illness can close the door on discrimination, and open it to opportunity – the right to affordable housing, equal opportunity employment, and a public education. For those living with a mental illness, it's a journey from shame and isolation to dignity and responsibility.

what to do...

"With the support of family and friends, I'm able to work through difficult times in my life. I enjoy exercising, watching/playing sports, reading, and volunteering. I'm active in the community."

*Chris, MHA, finance director for non-profit housing agency
Lives with clinical depression*

Things You Can Do to Combat Stigma and Discrimination

- Avoid disrespectful language about any group of people.
- Refer to the person, not the illness. "Sue lives with schizophrenia. She is not a schizophrenic." Remember, the mental illness is only a part of the person, just as heart disease or diabetes is for people living with these diseases.
- Listen to people who live with a mental illness. Learn how stigma impacts their day-to-day life and what they, like you, need to live a fulfilled life.
- Emphasize people's abilities, not their limitations.
- Challenge stereotypes about mental illness in the media or among the people you know.
- Encourage those you know who live with mental illness to share their stories.
- Contact your elected officials and demand that discrimination against people living with mental illnesses be stopped.
- Learn more about stigma and mental illness. Contact OpenMindsOpenDoors or your local Mental Health Association to learn more about how you can combat stigma and discrimination against people with mental illnesses.