

Thrive Together

A Weekend for Mental Health

TOOLKIT FOR FAITH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS



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Message from the First Lady of New York City



Dear Community Leader,

Thank you for participating in ThriveNYC's annual Weekend for Mental Health! By joining together with leaders across the country, you are building a groundbreaking movement to change our culture of shame and punishment around mental illness and addiction to one of healing and wellness.

Mental illness and substance misuse are incredibly common. All of us are affected in some way or another. But these are also deeply personal challenges. It can be difficult for people struggling to ask for help, and even more difficult to find the right care and treatment.

That's why community leaders are so important. When people need a little extra support, they often turn to you – as a counselor, a first responder in crisis, and a shoulder to lean on. You can create a safe, non-judgmental, and informed space that supports people struggling with mental health challenges, as well as their friends and family members.

Through the Weekend for Mental Health, we want to help you encourage and nurture open and honest conversations about mental health, and connect members of your community to the resources and care they need. This toolkit is your resource for engaging your community during the Weekend for Mental Health and beyond. In the following pages, you'll find:

- **Best Practices** for using this toolkit
- **A Discussion Guide** to frame your message
- **Guidance and Resources** to address mental illness and addiction
- **A Social Media Guide** to connect with other participating faith communities
- **An Overview of Mental Health and Addiction** to build your knowledge

To continue to grow your mental health knowledge and skills, please visit the Thrive Learning Center at nyc.gov/thrivelearningcenter.

With thousands of communities from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia participating, everyone's weekend will look a little bit different. That's why we want to hear from you about your experiences. Please, share your stories here and stay in touch going forward: bit.ly/thrivestorybank.

Thank you again for joining this movement. Together, we can make sure no community, no person stands alone. We can break through the cloud of stigma and shame and help our communities heal.

Sincerely,

First Lady Chirlane I. McCray

Best Practices for Using the Weekend for Mental Health Toolkit

These step-by-step suggestions will help you get the most out of this toolkit:

- 1) Use the **Discussion Guide** and **Overview of Mental Health and Addiction** to craft an informed message. Create a safe and welcoming environment by learning about mental illness and addiction, and identifying myths and stigma.
- 2) Develop a community inventory of available **Guidance and Resources**.
- 3) Connect with other participating communities using the **Social Media Guide**. Build the movement!
- 4) Share your Weekend for Mental Health experiences and stay in touch by completing the **Story Banking Form: bit.ly/thrivestorybank**.
- 5) Grow your mental health knowledge and skills by signing up for a **Mental Health First Aid** course near you, and visiting the **Thrive Learning Center at nyc.gov/thrivelearningcenter**.
- 6) Continue using this toolkit as a guide to promote mental health throughout the year. Conduct workshops and host lectures to raise awareness and reduce stigma in your community. Invite mental health professionals to speak. Encourage your members to start or join a support group.



Discussion Guide

May is National Mental Health Month and this weekend is the Weekend for Mental Health. We are joining thousands of other communities across the country to raise awareness about the important topic of mental health, with special attention to addiction. Our nation is in the midst of an epidemic: drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death for people under 50. Addiction is common, and can go hand-in-hand with mental illness. People often turn to substances to treat emotional pain. If we equip ourselves with the appropriate knowledge and resources, we can help those in need.

The role of communities:

Communities play a crucial role in addressing mental illness and addiction. By talking openly about these issues, we can reduce stigma and connect people to treatment. Our community can provide an informed and nonjudgmental space to support those who are struggling, as well as their friends and family members. Having a good support system is key; be sure to know who in your life you can turn to for help.

Define mental health and mental illness:

Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness; it refers to our well-being and how we think, feel, and interact with others. Mental illness refers to symptoms and disorders that interfere with our ability to function. Some types of mental illness interfere with our daily lives in limited ways, and others may require hospitalization. People with an undiagnosed or untreated mental illness may turn to substances to ease their pain.

Define addiction:

Addiction is a brain disease characterized by the compulsive use of alcohol or drugs, despite harmful consequences. It affects mental health and distorts the way the brain and body function, making it hard for people to stop using substances once they start. There is no one cause of addiction and many factors contribute to its development. If left untreated, addiction can harm relationships and work or school obligations. Addiction can also lead to death. However, addiction is preventable and treatable. There are many treatment options and each person must find which path to recovery works best for them.

Address common misconceptions:

There are many myths about mental illness and addiction, including the misconceptions that addiction is caused by character flaws; that people with mental illnesses are violent; that children don't experience mental illness or addiction; and that prevention doesn't work. These are wrong. Use the toolkit to share the facts.

Mental illness and addiction are treatable:

Reaching out for help can be hard, but is the first step to recovery. If you are living with a mental illness or addiction, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Treatment can vary and might include medication, therapy, improving relationships, finding support, or all of the above. Addiction is a chronic disease that may require long-term treatment with medication. It is important to note that relapse does not mean failure; it just means it is time to adjust and find additional means of support. Recovery is possible.

Now is the time to act:

We can promote mental health and support recovery for those with mental illness and addiction. I urge you to take action to help yourself if you are in need. Each one of us can also take action by preparing to help others. Consider getting trained in overdose prevention or Mental Health First Aid, visiting the Thrive Learning Center, or joining a support group. Together, we'll erase shame and stigma and overcome these challenges.

Guidance and Resources

National Resource Guide

Crisis and Access Lines: *Talk to someone who can help right now. Get connected with further treatment and resources if needed.*

- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
- Veteran's Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

Online Resources:

Thrive Learning Center:
Easy-to-use online learning tools to build your knowledge and help your community meet its mental health needs.

- nyc.gov/thrivelearningcenter

Mental Health America: *America's leading community based non-profit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness.*

- mentalhealthamerica.net

Online Mental Health Screening:
Take an anonymous, free screening to see if you are experiencing a mental health challenge.

- mentalhealthscreening.org

SAMHSA's Free Mobile Apps:
Mental health and addiction resources right on your mobile phone or tablet.

- store.samhsa.gov/apps/

Mental Health First Aid:

This course will give you the tools you need to respond to and help someone experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis.

- National Council for Behavioral Health: mentalhealthfirstaid.org

Medication Assisted Treatment:

Medications are available to reverse the effects of certain drugs and to help individuals avoid relapsing.

Information about naloxone:
Naloxone can reverse the effects of opioids and save someone from overdosing.

- getnaloxonenow.org

Information about Medication-Assisted Treatment:
These treatments can be valuable tools in avoiding relapse.

- samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment

Peer Support Groups:

Connect with others dealing with the same issues in a safe, nonjudgmental space. Peer support groups can help you feel less alone and more understood.

NAMI Support Groups for Family Members

- nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Family-Support-Group

Find a Support Group

- findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/link-focSelfGP

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

- dbsalliance.org

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

- adaa.org

SELF-CARE TIPS

Self-care is important; you must be physically and mentally nourished in order to help others. Here are a few self-care tips:

- Create and maintain healthy boundaries with community members
- Exercise
- Eat well
- Get enough sleep
- Schedule routine medical check-ups
- Get away! Go on vacation or unplug when needed

For more information on self-care, please visit the Thrive Learning Center.

Call 911/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) for assistance when an individual poses an immediate danger to self or others. A person who is suicidal should be considered an emergency.

Social Media Guide

Social media can be a powerful connector.

Sharing our stories with each other helps build stronger communities and can also decrease stigma. Use the hashtag #ThriveTogether to join the movement. Together we can overcome anything.

Below are some examples of tweets and Facebook posts you can use on your social media accounts:

Twitter:

Relapse is not a failure. It reflects the need to adjust and provide additional support. This year's Weekend for Mental Health is about opening up the conversation about mental health and addiction. No more shame, no more stigma — it's time to heal our community. #ThriveTogether

Mental health and substance misuse are not just [community name] challenges, they are for EVERYONE to address. No more shame, no more stigma — it's time to talk about it. #ThriveTogether

Mental illness affects ALL of our communities. Today we're opening up the first of many conversations about mental health and addiction in our own community. #ThriveTogether

We need to support our brothers and sisters facing challenges with mental health and addiction. No more shame, no more stigma — it's time to talk about it. #ThriveTogether

People struggling with addiction are dealing with a HEALTH challenge, not a MORAL one. As with any other disease, no one should face these challenges alone. No more shame, no more stigma — it's time to heal our community. #ThriveTogether

Facebook:

We're joining other communities from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico for the Annual Weekend for Mental Health to fight the stigma around mental health and addiction in our own community. Speaking openly about mental health is important not just to our community, but ALL communities. One in five Americans experience a mental health issue every year. Breaking down barriers to treatment, decreasing stigma surrounding mental illness and addiction, and supporting our brothers and sisters is vitally important. Together we can overcome these challenges. #ThriveTogether

Overview of Mental Health and Addiction

Communities play an important role.

Community leaders play a key role in promoting mental health and raising awareness about mental illness and addiction. You are already experienced in supporting others through difficult times. Mental illness and addiction are no different than other challenges communities and individuals face. But because these diseases are often isolating and stigmatized, it is important to provide an informed, welcoming, and non-judgmental space where your community members feel safe and supported.

Having a good support system is a key element to successfully addressing mental illness or addiction. You should encourage members of your community struggling with these diseases to seek support from a trusted individual such as a parent, family member, teacher, or healthcare provider. Be sure to remind them that some of the best support comes from people they know who:

- They like, respect, and trust
- Give good advice when asked for it
- Help them take action or figure out what to do in a challenging situation
- Allow them the space to change, grow, make decisions, and even mistakes
- Respect their confidentiality
- Let them express their feelings without judgment or teasing



Additionally, encourage your community members to sign up for a **Mental Health First Aid** training, where they will receive tools to improve listening without judgment, and respond to and help someone in distress until they can get the professional care they may need. Throughout the year, continue to promote mental health by conducting workshops, hosting lectures, and inviting mental health professionals to speak with your community.

Learning about mental health reduces stigma.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Our mental health is affected when we experience mental illness or addiction. These challenges are common, but help is available. People with mental illness or addiction can get better, and many recover completely.

People with mental illnesses are violent.

MYTH

FACT

Only 3-5% of violent acts are committed by individuals with a serious mental illness. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are 10 times more likely to be victims of violence than the general population.

What is mental illness?

Mental illness refers to symptoms that affect our mental health and interfere with our ability to function. It disrupts our ability to work, carry out daily activities, and engage in healthy relationships. Mental illnesses take many forms. Some are mild and only interfere in limited ways with daily life; others may require hospitalization.

What is addiction?

Addiction is a chronic brain disease characterized by the compulsive use of drugs or alcohol despite harmful consequences. A person may be suffering from addiction when their use of substances causes significant impairments, such as distorted thinking, behavior, and body functions. Addiction may also interfere with a person's ability to meet responsibilities at work, school, or home.

There are many reasons why people may turn to substance use, including curiosity, peer pressure, or to escape particular circumstances. No one turns to substance use thinking they will become addicted, but for many, the momentary feelings of pleasure or relief from stress, anxiety, or depression is enough to compel them to keep using drugs or alcohol. Additionally, it is common for someone with addiction to also experience mental illness. A mental illness may be present before the addiction. Or the addiction could trigger or make a mental illness worse.

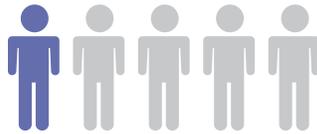
Addiction is preventable and there are several protective factors that can deter individuals, especially young people, from turning to drugs and alcohol:

- Learning to deal with negative emotions in a constructive manner
- Building positive relationships
- Consistent parental support and supervision
- Doing well in school
- Community or neighborhood pride

While these strengths and supports can go a long way in preventing addiction, it is important to remember that this disease does not discriminate. Regardless of background or circumstance, anyone can develop an addiction.

Who is affected?

Mental illness and addiction are common, touching almost every family. No ethnicity, income bracket, religion, or zip code is immune. Understanding the prevalence of these illnesses is key to reducing their stigma.



1 in 5 people
experience a mental
health issue every year



An estimated
88,000 people die from
alcohol-related causes annually

Children don't develop mental illness or addiction.

MYTH

FACT

An estimated three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24, and half begin before age 14.

Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death before age 50; opioids are involved in the majority of these deaths



Although mental illness and addiction are challenges shared by all of us, they are not shared equally. There are many reasons for that, from a fragmented and inadequate health care system to historic inequities in our political, economic, and social systems. To marginalize is to traumatize. Because of this complexity, people of color, those living in poverty, or those in rural areas often bear the greatest mental health burden, and yet are less likely to get the help they need. We don't have preventative health care services in the communities that need them most; not everyone has access to affordable health insurance, and the mental health workforce is ill-equipped to treat people of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Prevention
doesn't work.

MYTH

FACT

As with most
diseases, early
intervention is
important.
Providing parents
with preventative
interventions
reduces the risk of
their child
developing a
mental disorder
later in life by 40%.

These conditions are preventable and treatable.

As with so many medical conditions, prevention and early treatment are key. If communities and families intervene early, mental illness and addiction might be prevented, or symptoms can be made less severe. There are many strategies for early intervention, including addressing racial and economic inequity, promoting mental health education, strengthening relationships, and receiving timely screenings from a trusted healthcare professional.

It's important to remember that mental illness and addiction are treatable. Treatment for mental health challenges varies depending on the individual and can include medication, therapy, improving relationships and support, or all of the above. Connecting those in need to resources is an important part of supporting them, especially because people who have mental health challenges can find it hard to know where to turn. A trusted healthcare provider may help them determine if more professional help is needed. **Anyone can find support and get referrals for treatment by calling 1-800-662-HELP.**

Addiction should be treated as a chronic disease, which may require long-term therapy and medications. Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the most effective form of treatment for addiction. MAT is the use of medications, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a “whole-patient” approach to the treatment of addiction. Methadone and buprenorphine are the most highly studied types of MAT for opioid addiction, and they have the most proven positive outcomes. While MAT is primarily used to treat addiction to opioids, it can be used to treat addiction to alcohol as well. When prescribed properly, these medications have few or no side effects and enable patients to begin a path toward recovery. Like other chronic illnesses, relapse can occur. Relapse is not a sign of treatment failure but reflects the need to adjust and provide additional support.



For people at risk of dying from an overdose related to taking heroin or prescription painkillers, there is an emergency medication called naloxone. Naloxone is a safe and effective medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. This medication is available in many states in the country without a prescription so that anyone can give naloxone to someone who is overdosing. **Find information about local overdose prevention programs at getnaloxonenow.org.**

Recovery is possible.

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. When it comes to recovery from a mental illness or addiction, it's important to keep in mind: one size does not fit all. There is no single process or set length of treatment time for everyone.

As a community leader, you can help bring together people seeking support for treatment and recovery, whether they are individuals with mental illness and addiction, or their friends and family members. These kinds of support groups or relationships can positively affect individual recovery; people who have common lived experiences have a unique ability to help each other. Consider starting or joining a **support group** in your community.

Finally, thank you for participating in the Weekend for Mental Health. People in our communities who have mental illness and addiction are suffering needlessly. We have the tools to help them address their challenges when they are ready.



Thrive NYC

nyc.gov/thrivenyc

[#ThriveTogether](https://twitter.com/ThriveTogether)



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