

# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

## *Four Ways Forward*

### Toolkit for Organizations



NATIONAL COUNCIL  
*for* Mental Wellbeing

2024



## A MESSAGE FROM CHUCK INGOGLIA, PRESIDENT & CEO

### *Let's Make Mental Wellbeing a Priority*

As a society, we have become much more cognizant of the scope of the mental health challenges people face. Despite this awareness and the increasing conversations around mental wellbeing, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) — released in November 2023 — illustrated how much work we still have to do.

#### **The survey said that in 2022:**

- **59.3 million** people aged 18 and older had a mental illness (versus 57.8 million in 2021).
- **4.8 million** adolescents aged 12 to 17 had a major depressive episode (versus 5 million in 2021).

As we acknowledge May being Mental Health Awareness Month, I want to share the National Council for Mental Wellbeing's latest resource to help you pass along information and support mental health in your communities and in the workplace.

We are doing more than just spreading the word about Mental Health Awareness Month. This new toolkit serves as a comprehensive guide, offering practical tips, resources and strategies — from social media content to informative educational materials. Please consider sharing them with your network and on your social media platforms.

Our goal is to provide you with the information to navigate conversations about mental health with confidence and compassion — this month and all year long.

Let's work together to support one another and those who will benefit from our important work to make mental wellbeing — including recovery from substance use — a reality for everyone.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck Ingoglia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Chuck Ingoglia**

President and CEO

[National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)

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# GETTING STARTED: FOUR WAYS FORWARD

“Four Ways Forward” is an invitation for you and members of your organization to take action this Mental Health Awareness Month in four unique ways across the span of four weeks. By raising your voice, prioritizing your self-care, celebrating mental wellbeing and being the difference, you and your employees can help advance mental health awareness within the workplace and in your community. Let’s get started!

## ***Week 1: Raise Your Voice and Advocate for Change***

In SAMHSA’s [2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), nearly 50 million people aged 12 or older in the U.S. indicated having a substance use disorder, and nearly 60 million adults aged 18 or older had any mental illness (defined as a mental, behavioral or emotional disorder). Adolescents are also facing significant challenges, as 3.4 million people aged 12-17 had serious thoughts of suicide and 1 in 5 had a major depressive episode.

Not enough people are getting the care they need. According to the survey, in the year prior, only 1 in 4 people had received the substance use disorder treatment they needed, only half of the adults received the necessary mental health treatment and more than 40% of youth aged 12-17 indicated not receiving the mental health treatment they needed.

By advocating for [public policy that expands access to comprehensive care and treatment](#), we can work to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to the care they need, when and where they need it. Your voices, stories and experiences help policymakers understand why we need action now to improve access to care and treatment. Here are four things you can do to help advocate and stay informed:

- 1.** [Sign up for our Advocacy Alerts](#) to be notified when there are opportunities to contact your elected officials and urge them to support key bills, and [stay up to date](#) on breaking federal mental health and substance use policy news by joining our weekly Capitol Connector newsletter distribution list.
- 2.** Lend your voice, share your story and show your support of our [advocacy priorities](#) and policies that remove barriers to accessing care and treatment.
- 3.** Learn about innovative [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics \(CCBHCs\)](#) and how they’re helping improve access to mental health and substance use care and efforts to further support and grow the number of CCBHCs nationwide.
- 4.** [Download our Advocacy Handbook](#) to access tips, tricks and templates for becoming a mental health and substance use treatment advocate in your community.

## Week 2: Lead by Example — Prioritize Your Self-care

Practicing self-care is not only beneficial for you — it sets an important example for others in your organization. Your self-care practices demonstrate the importance of looking after one's mental wellbeing. Prioritize your own mental health this month by implementing self-care routines and healthy coping mechanisms. Here are four ideas to get started:

1. Refer to the [National Council's activity calendar](#) with daily suggestions and opportunities for practicing self-care this month.
2. [Take a mental health day at work this month](#). Plan time away from the stress of your workload to nurture your mental wellbeing.
3. Use relaxation exercises like meditation and [deep breathing](#) to help you relax, stay present and centered.
4. [Feeling overwhelmed?](#) Try to do at least one relaxing activity each day, like a short walk, listening to music, reading or journaling for 30 minutes.

## Week 3: Celebrate Mental Wellbeing

By communicating how important mental wellbeing is to you, you can help raise awareness about mental health throughout your organization and community. Wear your badge of honor for mental health advocacy, participate in National Council partner activities and more:

1. [Download](#) our suite of graphics and post them to your social media channels to celebrate your mental wellbeing and show your pride.
2. Support mental wellbeing across the country by [taking part](#) in MTV's Mental Health Awareness Day campaign on Thursday, May 16.
3. Celebrate the month with the [Mental Health Coalition](#), a national community of organizations that's creating positive change.
4. Reshare our social media activity throughout the month, and reach out to check in with your family, friends and networks. Look for opportunities to showcase your mental wellbeing pride.

## Week 4: Be the Difference — Get Involved

Supporting Mental Health Awareness Month also means supporting others who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge — from your employees and their families to your clients and their communities. By knowing how to offer assistance in their time of need, you can be the difference in someone’s recovery journey.

We believe every 1 in 15 people nationwide should have the ability to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges. You can join us in that mission by:

1. Hosting a [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) training](#) in your organization. Our [MHFA at Work](#) program enables you to deliver basic mental health education to your employees, upskill them, create a network of peer support and support their wellbeing strategies.
2. Helping us train more people in MHFA to potentially save lives! Your [generous donation](#) will help people across the country have access to the information and skills to support their loved ones in need.
3. Attend our [webinars](#) — and encourage others to join you — to learn about the topics and trends shaping mental health and substance use treatment and care. Take advantage of 50+ webinars a year!
4. Stay knowledgeable on all-things mental health, so you can educate others, by [reading our blog](#) and [signing up for our newsletters](#). You’ll find insights from experts, self-care tips, helpful resources and more!



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

To show your support for Mental Health Awareness Month and your commitment to investing in your employees' mental wellbeing, we encourage you to share these articles with your organization's leadership team, HR personnel and managers.

### *10 Tips to Boost Wellbeing in the Workplace in 2024*

Research from the [American Heart Association](#) shows that routine stress, including job strain and long working hours, may contribute to serious health problems, including elevated risk for heart disease and stroke and experiencing depression for the first time.

Working on fast-paced, demanding projects and constantly being connected to technologies can make the workplace exciting — and very challenging. While being challenged at work can help strengthen resilience as a skill, it can also come with a cost. Approximately two in three employees report that work is a significant source of stress. And stress can lead to depression and anxiety.

By taking steps to build a more resilient workforce, you can help your employees better manage their high-demanding jobs, stay balanced when faced with strong emotions and support each other in difficult times.

Use these tips to move your workplace away from routine stress and toward resiliency.

- 1. Foster an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their challenges and needs** by having open conversations. Encourage honest talk about mental health to break down stigmas.
- 2. Establish a wellness committee or resource group** that can focus on bringing wellness resources into your workplace. This group can help design and implement initiatives that include promoting mental health.
- 3. Review your company's mental health resources** for psychological safety practices, resources and tools to share with employees.
- 4. Bring mental health experts into the workplace** to host seminars on stress management, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Educating employees on effective strategies for handling workplace challenges goes a long way.
- 5. Empower your employees** to support one another in times of stress. Encouraging peer connections fosters a sense of community and provides additional avenues of support.
- 6. Be a vocal and visible leader** who makes the health and wellbeing of all employees a priority. Demonstrating a commitment to employee wellbeing sets the tone for the entire workplace.

- 7. Encourage philanthropy** in and outside of the workplace, as giving to others can improve mental health and morale.
- 8. Provide management training** to all supervisors so they can balance emotional support with work demands.
- 9. Conduct annual reviews of your company's progress** related to mental health and wellbeing. Identify areas for improvement and celebrate successes to maintain momentum.
- 10. Train your team in Mental Health First Aid at Work** so they learn to recognize and respond to colleagues who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge in the workplace. Our latest MHFA at Work courses are designed to empower every level of your organization, fostering a culture of support, compassion and wellbeing. They're available in industry-specific versions for restaurants, retail and manufacturing, and there are learning options for every employee.

## ***Using Person-first Language to Reduce Stigma***

For millennia, people living with mental health and substance use challenges were imprisoned, tortured and subjected to inhumane treatment. Our society has come a long way since then, however, the stigmatization of these challenges is still a significant problem. Even subtle instances of stigma can do harm — think about how often television shows depict individuals living with things like schizophrenia or alcohol use disorder as dangerous villains.

[Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)](#) describes stigma as negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behaviors (discrimination). According to a [report](#), over 50% of individuals with clinical-level mental health risks do not seek help. In the U.S., 25% of those not seeking treatment report it is due to not wanting others to know. This is stigma in action, and it can lead to people feeling too ashamed to discuss their symptoms or seek treatment, acting as a barrier to recovery.

There is something you can do to change things. Language is powerful, and your choice of words can either break down misconceptions and stereotypes or feed into them. Stigmatizing language — such as “crazy” — perpetuates negative perceptions, which can result in people being excluded from jobs, housing, social activities and relationships. Additionally, people may begin to believe the negative things that others say about them, delaying them on their recovery journey.

Using person-first language puts the focus on the individual, not their disorder or diagnosis. MHFA has [developed a guide](#) on using more inclusive, person-first language in your discussions about mental wellbeing.



For more help on expanding your person-first vocabulary:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides [guidance](#) on communicating with individuals with disabilities using person-first language.
- The CDC also provides [guidance on person-first language](#) when communicating about mental health and substance use, as well as referring to different communities and populations, including individuals with disabilities.
- The National Institutes of Health offers [information](#) and sample person-first language regarding substance use disorders.
- Obesity Canada takes things a step further by offering [guidance](#) on using person-first language when discussing individuals affected by obesity.

Studies show that better understanding of the experiences of people with mental health and substance use challenges can reduce or eliminate stigma and discrimination. Using person-first language is a great place to start, as it helps validate individuals' experiences without reducing them to a diagnosis or condition. It also fosters greater understanding, dignity and respect for everyone, whether they are experiencing mental health challenges or not. Together, we can break down stigma and show every person living in the U.S. that recovery is possible!



## Using ALGEE to Support Others With Developmental Disabilities

**Mental Health FIRST AID**

Mental Health First Aid teaches people how to identify, understand and respond when someone is experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge.

The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan can be used in any order.

- 1. A APPROACH, ASSESS**  
for risk of suicide or harm.
- 2. L LISTEN**  
nonjudgmentally.
- 3. G GIVE**  
reassurance and information.
- 4. E ENCOURAGE**  
appropriate professional help.
- 5. E ENCOURAGE**  
self-help and other support strategies.

Don't suffer in silence.

Call or text 988 if you or a friend is in distress or considering suicide. You can also chat with 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at [988Lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

If it's a medical emergency, CALL 911.

Learn more at [MHFA.org](https://mhfa.org)

 **Mental Health FIRST AID**  
from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

For Mental Health First Aiders, knowing how and when to support someone who is experiencing a distressing situation is vital, but can also be difficult to navigate in the moment. The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Action Plan (ALGEE) is a step-by-step approach to deliver safe and effective support to those in need, taking into account that each person and their identity, experiences and challenges are unique.

The MHFA Action Plan is designed to be used in different scenarios, and you may encounter a situation in which an individual has developmental disabilities.

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), developmental disabilities are a group of conditions resulting from an impairment in physical, learning, language or behavioral areas. These conditions begin during childhood development, may impact day-to-day functioning and usually last throughout a person's life. There are [many types](#) of physical or intellectual developmental disabilities, such as epilepsy, vision impairment, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Down syndrome, all of which can impact individuals in different and sometimes challenging ways.

You should use the MHFA Action Plan (ALGEE) when you believe someone is experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis. If that person may also have a developmental disability, you'll need to take special assistance and other considerations into account, too. If the person is OK with it, you might want to speak to a family member, caregiver or legal guardian to share what you have noticed and learn if they have similar concerns. If the person does not have the ability to make their own health care decisions, you should find out who is permitted to give consent for these decisions on their behalf.

## The MHFA Action Plan has 5 steps, which can be used in any order.



### **Approach, Assess for Risk of Suicide or Harm, and Assist.**

Try to find a comfortable place to start a conversation with the person, keeping their privacy and confidentiality in mind. Ask them if there is anyone they want to be part of the conversation, like a family member, caregiver, professional helper or friend — or if they'd rather meet alone instead.

It is important to determine if there is a communication gap. Ask the person with the disability (or their caregiver or professional helper) about their ability to understand and if they have specific communication needs. If you are having trouble understanding them, ask if they would allow someone else to be part of the conversation to help you understand. If someone else is present, like a translator or caregiver, be sure to speak directly to the person with developmental disabilities and not to that other person.

### **If the person appears to be at risk of harming themselves or others, call 911 immediately.**

Tell the dispatcher that responders with specific training in mental health or crisis de-escalation are needed and inform the dispatcher and responders that the person has a developmental disability. If they're not already present, try to locate the person's family, legal guardian, caregiver or someone from their support system.



### **Listen Nonjudgmentally**

Many people experiencing a challenge or distress want to be heard first, so let the person share without interrupting them. Try to have empathy for their situation. You can get the conversation started by saying something like, "I noticed that ..." Give them time to think about what has been said or to express themselves and offer frequent breaks.

Sometimes repetitive behaviors such as repeating movements or sounds and touching or moving objects can help a person manage their emotions. These are known as stimming behaviors, and you should not try and stop them.



### **Give Reassurance and Information**

When the person is finished sharing, offer reassuring statements such as "Thank you for sharing your experience with me" or "Thank you for trusting me." Before offering any specific information, check what support systems and resources are already available to the person. You can provide them or their caregiver with national or local resources.



### **Encourage Appropriate Professional Help**

If mental health professionals with expertise in developmental disabilities are available in your area, share those resources. Be mindful that the person may not need or want this type of care. If that's the case, recommend that they or their caregiver speak to their primary care doctor, who can make an appropriate referral.



### **Encourage Self-Help and Other Support Strategies**

Ask if the person has used self-help strategies in the past that they found helpful. If they have and they need support to use them, you can provide that support, find others who can or call a national hotline, such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) HelpLine](#).

If you want to suggest self-help strategies, carefully consider if the person will be able to use them. If they want to learn to use them, suggest specialized education programs (if available) to help them.

Every individual and situation is unique, and staying calm is the most important thing as you offer support. Remember that your role is not to diagnose someone or solve the problem, but instead to provide support and information. By using the MHFA Action Plan, you can #BeTheDifference and offer much-needed help.

**To learn more about the MHFA Action Plan (ALGEE) and how to support someone in a crisis or noncrisis situation, take a [MHFA course](#). More information on MHFA training and resources is available at [MentalHealthFirstAid.org](#).**

## Using Your Employee Assistance Program

One valuable resource that many organizations offer is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAPs are confidential, free and easily accessible services designed to provide support and assistance to employees facing personal or work-related challenges, including mental health concerns.

This Mental Health Awareness Month, take the first step toward prioritizing your wellbeing by utilizing your EAP services.

### Why Use Your EAP?

- **Confidential support:** EAPs offer a safe and confidential space for employees to discuss their mental health concerns without fear of judgment or repercussion. This confidentiality encourages employees to seek help early, preventing issues from escalating.
- **Professional guidance and referrals:** EAPs provide access to trained professionals, such as counselors, therapists and social workers, who can offer guidance, support and resources to address a wide range of mental health challenges. EAP counselors can connect employees with additional resources and services, such as therapy, support groups and community resources to support their mental health needs.
- **Work-life balance:** EAPs often offer services beyond mental health support, including assistance with work-life balance, stress management, financial counseling and legal guidance, helping employees navigate various aspects of their lives.
- **Preventative measures:** EAPs help employees proactively address mental health concerns, leading to improved overall wellbeing, productivity and job satisfaction.

### How to Access Your EAP:

- **Review your workplace benefits:** Familiarize yourself with the mental health services offered through your organization's EAP by reviewing your employee benefits package or contacting your HR department for more information.
- **Confidential contact:** Reach out to your EAP provider directly to schedule an appointment or access services. Remember that all communications with your EAP counselor are confidential and will not be shared with your employer without your consent.
- **Make the most of your sessions:** Take advantage of your EAP sessions by discussing your mental health concerns openly and honestly. Be proactive in seeking support and using the resources and guidance offered to you.
- **Encourage others:** Spread awareness about the EAP and its benefits among your colleagues. Encourage others to seek help when needed and normalize the use of mental health resources in the workplace.

## Additional Blog Posts

For more best practices when it comes to supporting the mental wellbeing of your employees and colleagues, check out these blog posts:

- [Five Tips to Turn Around a Stressful Day](#)
- [How to Recognize if Your Colleague Is Struggling](#)
- [Stress, Anxiety, Depression: What It Looks Like at Work and How to Provide Support](#)

## Tools, Resources and Publications

To help you raise awareness in your community — and keep you informed of mental wellbeing issues and trends — here are some of our resources you can explore or share throughout Mental Health Awareness Month and year-round:

- [Access our video playlists on YouTube](#)
- [Check out Conversations on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion With the National Council Medical Director Institute](#)
- [Explore our resource directory](#)
- [Read our blog filled with best practices, insights and tips](#)
- [Register for an upcoming learning opportunity](#)
- [View our focus areas for specific publications and tools](#)
- [Watch our Wellbeing Wednesdays videos](#)



## National Support Resources

The National Council is committed to building communities that are safer and healthier for everyone. Take a minute to check out these resources:

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, as well as best practices for professionals in the U.S.
- [The SAMHSA Helpline](#): SAMHSA's national helpline is a free, confidential information service that provides treatment and support referrals 24/7 to people facing mental illness and addictions. Call 800-662-4357 (HELP) for support.
- [FindTreatment.gov](#): The confidential and anonymous resource for people seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the U.S. and its territories.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#): A national organization that provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.
- [The Trevor Project](#): 24/7 crisis support services to LGBTQ+ young people. Text, chat or call any time to reach a trained counselor.



## SHAREABLE GRAPHICS

We encourage you to use our [Mental Health Awareness Month graphics](#) across your organization's social media platforms this month.



Feel free to use these hashtags to participate in the national conversation:

**#MentalHealthAwarenessMonth**

**#FourWaysForward**

Be sure to tag the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and Mental Health First Aid USA in your posts so we can follow your activity!



<https://www.instagram.com/nationalcouncil/>

<https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealth-firstaidusa/>



<https://twitter.com/nationalcouncil>

<https://twitter.com/MHFirstAidUSA>



<https://www.facebook.com/TheNationalCouncil/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealth-FirstAidUSA/>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/national-council-for-mental-wellbeing>



## **Email Signature**

Are you a First Aider? To let others in your company and network know that you are ready to have honest conversations or lend an empathetic ear, consider using this [Outlook signature graphic](#).



*I am trained in*  
**Mental Health**  
**FIRST AID**

***Thank you for downloading our  
Mental Health Awareness Month toolkit!***

**We hope you've found these resources helpful in recognizing and celebrating the importance of mental wellbeing within and beyond your organization.**

