

Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Messages

Key Audience: Decision Makers

(Employers, landlords, medical providers, law enforcement, etc.)

Mental health challenges are more common than you may realize.

One in 5 California adults report needing help with a mental or emotional health problem.ⁱ Nationally, that figure is 1 in 4.ⁱⁱ

Nearly two-thirds of California adults report having experienced close contact with a person experiencing mental health challenges, either as a friend, relative, coworker or service provider.ⁱⁱⁱ

The wide spectrum of mental illness includes post-partum depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Not all mental illnesses are chronic, some may last for a relatively short time.

When people are able to get help, they can recover or learn to manage their mental health, and live happy, productive lives.

Managing a mental health challenge requires responsibility and reliability, two traits that are valued highly by employers, landlords and service providers.

Key Fact:

- + With support and treatment, between 70 and 90 percent of individuals diagnosed with a mental illness have a significant reduction in symptoms and improved quality of life.^{iv}

You have a lot in common with someone who is living with mental health challenges.

People diagnosed with a mental illness are teachers, doctors, politicians, lawyers, artists, business owners and scientists, among many other occupations that contribute to society in major ways.

We have responsibilities and goals, worries and fears. We make important contributions to our community, and rely on community support when we need it. We hope that everything will turn out OK.

People living with mental health challenges are just people. They are our colleagues, friends and neighbors. They are not defined by their condition. It is just a small part of who they are and how they live their lives.

Key Fact:

- + Common risk factors that can lead to mental health challenges, according to the Mayo Clinic, include: undergoing stressful life situations such as the death of a loved one, divorce or loss of a job; traumatic experiences such as military combat or being assaulted; having a chronic medical condition, such as cancer; or being abused or neglected as a child.

Most people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are not violent or dangerous.

It would be unfair to judge someone because he or she has been diagnosed with a mental illness.

Key Facts:

- + People with serious mental health challenges are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. More than 25 percent of people with severe mental illness report being victims of a violent crime within a given year, a rate nearly 12 times higher than that of the general population.^v
- + Mental illness accounts for, at most, 3 percent of all violence committed in the U.S.^{vi}

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Stigma hurts. It can do more damage than a mental illness itself.

Many people say that stigma and discrimination can be a bigger challenge to their quality of life than their mental health challenges are.

Stigma around mental illness is one of the primary barriers to people seeking and receiving treatment.

Key Facts:

- + *[Employers:]* Studies indicate no difference between the productivity of people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness and that of other employees.^{vii} However, stigma and discrimination often keep them from applying for or being offered employment, despite their qualifications for a job.
- + *[Landlords:]* The Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act both rejected the historical approach of isolating those with mental health challenges from the public in residential treatment settings. Denying housing for people with mental health challenges is a civil rights violation on the level of “separate but equal” racial segregation and discrimination.
- + *[Law enforcement:]* It is estimated that people who have been diagnosed with severe mental illness are four times more likely to be killed by a police officer.^{viii} Many law-enforcement agencies are adopting training programs to help their officers understand mental illness and work with it productively, avoiding tragedy.
- + *[Medical providers:]* Mental health issues can manifest as physical symptoms, and physical health problems can result in severe mental health challenges. It is vitally important that physicians screen for mental illnesses such as depression, not only to have a fuller perspective of a patient’s experience, but as yet another way to save a life.

In addition to being unfair and ethically unacceptable, it is also illegal to deny someone any rights due to their real or perceived mental illness.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 made it illegal for employers or public services to discriminate against someone living with a mental illness.

The Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968) made it illegal for landlords or other real-estate entities to discriminate against someone living with a mental illness.

Now is the time to end the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness in California. I will be a part of the solution, not the problem.

I can help to end stigma by openly accepting people who are diagnosed with a mental illness in my work and in my community.

I am in a unique position to give people who are living with mental health challenges what they, just like anyone else, truly deserve – a job, a lease, a public service or simply a respectful conversation – that helps them live a full and productive life.

The strength of the community depends on the well-being of our individuals. It is our civic duty to stand together and support those living with mental health challenges.

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Taglines & Sound Bites

These short and memorable lines can help get your point across and make it stick in the minds of your audience. Use them as key points of emphasis in your remarks or, even better, pick one and make it the central theme of your talk.

Daily stress, anxiety, sleepless nights ... I know some of the people in this room can relate.

Someone near to you is suffering and needs your help.

You are in a unique position to make a difference.

Equal opportunity is upheld by law, but it is embodied in our daily choices.

The strength of our community depends on the well-being of our individuals.

ⁱ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. *Adult Mental Health Needs in California*, November 2011.

ⁱⁱ Grant D, Kravits N, et al., *Mental Health Status and Use of Mental Health Services by California Adults*, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Knowledge Networks and Field Research, *Baseline Survey of California Children 11-13 and Adult Decision-Makers 25+*, 2012.

^{iv} National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

^v Linda Teplin et al., *Crime Victimization in Adults with Severe Mental Illness: Comparison with the National Crime Victimization Survey*, General Psychiatry, August 2005.

^{vi} H. Harwood, A. Ameen, G. Denmead et al., *The Economic Costs of Mental Illness*, 1992, Rockville, Md.: NIMH, 2000.

^{vii} World Health Organization, *Mental Health and Work: Impact, issues and good practices*, 2000.

^{viii} Treatment Advocacy Center, *Law enforcement and people with severe mental illnesses*, 2005.