



Friday, April 6, 2012

National Public Health Week • [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org)

# A healthier America begins with mental and emotional well-being

SOMETIMES THE SMALLEST CHANGE CAN MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE. If we take small actions, our communities, homes and families will see the large benefits of preventive care and grow the movement. Each year, nearly 1 million Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented. When it comes to mental and emotional well-being, the little things truly make an impact. Early detection of mental health problems and proper treatment are just a few of the ways people can stay healthy.

By identifying the signs of depression and suicide early and referring people to the appropriate resources, Americans can reduce their risk of devastating mental health issues. Even the smallest preventive changes and initiatives can make a big difference in living healthier lives.

## Did You Know?

- Many mental health and emotional disorders are preventable and treatable. Early identification and treatment can help prevent the onset of disease, decrease rates of chronic disease and help people lead longer, healthier lives.<sup>59</sup>
- About one in five young people experience a mental, emotional or behavior disorder at some point in their lifetime.<sup>60</sup>
- In a given year, fewer than half of people diagnosed with a mental illness receive treatment. The unmet need for mental health services is greatest among underserved groups, including elderly people, racial and ethnic minorities, those with low incomes, those without health insurance and residents of rural areas.<sup>61</sup>
- More than 34,000 Americans die every year as a result of suicide — approximately one suicide every 15 minutes.<sup>62</sup>
- Approximately 20 percent of high school students report being bullied at school, and more than 30 percent report having been in a physical fight.<sup>63</sup>
- Risk factors for suicide include alcohol or substance abuse, isolation, extreme emotional stress, history of child maltreatment and mental health conditions such as depression.<sup>64</sup>
- Family and community rejection of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth, including bullying, can have profound and long-term impacts, such as depression, use of illegal drugs and suicidal behavior.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2005;62(6), 593-602.

<sup>60</sup> Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2005;62(6), 593-602.

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<sup>62</sup> Heron M, Hoyert DL, Murphy SL, Xu J, Kochanek KD, Tejada-Vera B. National Vital Statistics Report Deaths: Final Data for 2006. 2009;57(14).

<sup>63</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2009. *MMWR, Surveillance Summaries* 2009;59(no. SS-5).

<sup>64</sup> Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2005;62(6), 593-602.

<sup>65</sup> Ryan C, Huebner D, Diaz RM, Sanchez J. Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults. *Pediatrics* 2009;123:346-352.

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Together we can address these statistics and live longer and healthier lives. You can protect yourself, your family and community in many ways, no matter where you are. Taking action, both big and small, to evaluate and treat mental illness is more than just common sense — it's effective. Below are just a few examples of how you can prevent mental illness:

### Start small...

- ✓ Promote positive early childhood development, including positive parenting and violence-free homes.
- ✓ Seek out proper treatment, promote your community's resources and receive proper screening for mental health issues.
- ✓ Provide positive parenting practices to reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment and the emergence of child behavioral problems.
- ✓ Identify the signs of depression and suicide and refer people to appropriate resources.
- ✓ Write a letter to the editor of your local paper in response to a recent article that stresses the importance of promoting mental and emotional well-being during NPHW and beyond.
- ✓ Encourage employers to provide comprehensive mental health services as part of health care plans and promote violence-free environments.
- ✓ Become more involved in your community by becoming a mentor, tutoring youth or joining a faith or spiritual community.
- ✓ Encourage children and adolescents to participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities.

### Think big...

- ✓ Create a local movement: Host an organized community activity, such as volunteering, that encourages social participation and inclusion for all people, including older people and those with disabilities.
- ✓ Encourage a local mental health care facility to train key community members such as adults who work with the elderly, youth and armed services personnel to identify the signs of depression and suicide and refer people to resources and help centers.
- ✓ Hold a meeting with a policymaker about the possibility of expanding access to mental health services, such as patient navigation and support groups, and enhancing linkages between mental health, substance abuse, disability and other social services.
- ✓ Work with hospitals and primary care physicians to provide tools, guidance and best practices to promote positive early childhood and youth development to prevent child abuse.
- ✓ Host an event with members of the military that provides easy-to-use information about mental and emotional well-being.

There is much more you can do to encourage mental and emotional well-being beyond these actions. By raising awareness of ways to diagnose mental health problems early during National Public Health Week and beyond, you can help your community be a healthier one.

On Friday, April 6, 2012, the American Public Health Association Student Assembly will celebrate its third annual National Public Health Student Day. If you are on a college campus, what will you do to celebrate public health and work to create a healthier nation? Visit [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org) to learn how students across the country are celebrating NPHW Student Day.