



DEI *Perspectives*

Mental Health Cannot Wait

By: DEI Champion

Mental Health Awareness Month has been celebrated annually in the month of May since its establishment in 1949 by Mental Health America. The observance of Mental Health Awareness Month aims to bring awareness, advocacy and general focus on conversations surrounding mental health, while also improving mental health resources available to those in need. Mental Health Awareness month assists in the goal of bringing attention to the challenges and struggles of those who live with mental illness face every day of their lives, while also honing in on how those who do not live with these illnesses can create supportive, understanding and safe environments for those who need them. There are so many reasons why mental health cannot wait, as it can be a matter of life and death.

One of the biggest hurdles we have yet to overcome as a society is the deep stigmatization of mental illness. Yes, we have seen over the last number of years some movement in the “right” direction where mental illness is more widely addressed and also talked about openly; however, there are countless people who are silent about their struggles with mental illness. This, of course, is a problem because this is often times where we see those stigmas deter people who suffer from mental illness from getting the care that they desperately need to carry on with their lives in a meaningful way. So, what can we do? As a society, we need to TALK to each other more often with HONESTY and without JUDGEMENT, whether that be with one another or with ourselves because, let’s be real, most of us can recognize when we need help. It’s getting help that can often be the most difficult, albeit the most important.



When I think about the immediacy of mental health issue, I immediately think of the severity of the issue. Let’s say we are looking at someone who lives with bi-polar disorder and they are having a manic episode versus let’s say a broken arm. Most would say, oh yeah, the broken arm is much higher level of an issue than a manic episode...but is it really?



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Many people who are exhibiting symptoms of manic episodes can experience grandiosity, hyperactivity, impulsivity, sleepless nights, delusions and auditory and visual hallucinations, along with other symptoms that can lead to very serious and dangerous actions and consequences. So, why is it that we immediately recognize the broken arm as the higher-level issue when it could very well not be? Ask yourself this: why do we often categorize a mental health crisis as ancillary or something we can simply “live with,” whereas a broken arm is an issue that needs immediate attention? Is it that a broken arm is tangible? Or is it that we have been taught through life experiences and messaging that the mental health crisis isn’t a crisis at all, it’s just something you treat if you can find time or can afford it? This cannot be the answer because...**MENTAL HEALTH CANNOT WAIT!**

WHY IT CAN'T WAIT:

- Nearly 1 in 5 American adults will have a diagnosable mental health condition in any given year
- 46 percent of Americans will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition sometime in their life, half of which will develop conditions by the age of 14
- 59.3 million American adults live with mental illness, accounting for 23.1 percent of adults
- 42.5 million American adults live with anxiety disorders, with a lifetime prevalence of 31.6 percent
- Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental illnesses in America
- 22.5 million American adults live with major depression
- 3.3 million American adults live with bipolar disorder, and an estimated 2.5 percent of adults will experience bipolar disorder at some point in their lives
- 46.5 million American adults live with a substance use disorder, equivalent to 18.1 percent of adults
- 5.2 percent or 13.2 million American adults have or have had suicidal thoughts
- 13.4 percent or 3.4 million of America’s youth (ages 12-17) have or have had suicidal thoughts

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:

Take a Mental Health Test - <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/>

Learn about Mental Health Month - <https://mhanational.org/mental-health-month/>

Interested in Mental Health First Aid? - <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

Stories and Articles - <https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs/>

Need Help? - <https://988helpline.org/>