

# Responding to the Mental Health Needs in Your Community

*As hospitals and local public health departments survey their communities they are increasingly finding that mental health is mentioned. Many are asking what they can do to address this identified need in their communities. Here are some suggestions that hospitals with or without inpatient mental health units can use to begin addressing mental health and mental illnesses in their communities.*

## 1 Raise Awareness

- Participate in the MakeItOk (<http://makeitok.org/>) campaign by putting up posters, placing an ad in the local newspaper, adding your organization's name as a sponsor.
- Place information about mental health and mental illnesses in waiting areas and lobbies and/or host a NAMI in the Lobby, where NAMI volunteers sit outside the unit and provide information and hope to family members visiting their loved one in the mental health unit (<http://www.namihelps.org/education/Providers.html>).
- Bring an In Our Own Voice speaker who will share his or her story of living with mental illness to your hospital for staff, patients and the general public (<http://www.namihelps.org/education/in-our-own-voice.html>).
- Sponsor events during Mental Health Month in May, Children's Mental Health Day on May 8, 2014, or Mental Illness Awareness Week, Oct. 7-13, 2013.
- Collaborate with a mental health agency to provide free mental health screenings for hospital/clinic patients during Mental Illness Awareness Week in October.

## 2 Reach Out to Those Affected by Mental Illnesses

- Provide copies of booklets on the mental health system (NAMI publications available for free at <http://www.namihelps.org/publications.html>).
- Hand out NAMI's booklets on Understanding a Psychiatric Hospitalization (children: <http://www.namihelps.org/NAMIChildrensHospBooklet2013Y.pdf> and adults: [http://www.namihelps.org/NAMI\\_HospitalizationBrochure.pdf](http://www.namihelps.org/NAMI_HospitalizationBrochure.pdf)).
- Publicize support groups and classes being held in your community on mental illnesses.
- Educate individuals with mental illnesses and their family members about the mental health system, such as providing an informational "welcome packet" with information on what patients and families can expect when they arrive for mental health treatment.
- Include people with mental illnesses and family members on advisory committees for the mental health unit/services you provide, and if you don't have a committee, start one.

### 3 Increase Mental Health Literacy

- Sponsor an Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid ([http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/program\\_overview/](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/program_overview/)) class in your community.
- Hold forums or lectures with guest speakers on mental illnesses and mental health.
- Collaborate with local schools to increase the understanding of mental illnesses in children and youth, including the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (for more information see [http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/brfss/ACE\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/brfss/ACE_ExecutiveSummary.pdf)).
- Provide links to videos on mental illnesses on your website.

### 4 Normalize Mental Illnesses in Health Care Settings

- Offer staff training on mental illnesses especially from the ED and inpatient wards (NAMI Minnesota offers two free online trainings: “Compassion into Action: Recognizing and Responding to Patients with Mental Illnesses and Allies in Recovery” and “Reducing Stigma,” available at <http://www.namihelps.org/classes.html>).
- Place posters produced by NAMI about language, recovery and how to help on psychiatric wards and outpatient settings (available for free at <http://www.namihelps.org/education/Providers.html>).
- Partner with mental health crisis teams and/or CIT trained police officers (call your local police department for information).
- Establish a team to look at every aspect of the mental health unit and develop and implement recommendations to make it a more healing, empathetic and respectful environment.
- Explore and adopt the RARE recommendations regarding mental illnesses (<http://www.namihelps.org/education/Providers.html>)
- Have videos about mental illness playing on the units or in the waiting areas outside the units.
- Encourage visitors to bring get well cards and other items when visiting people in the mental health unit.