



60%

of adults with a mental illness didn't receive mental health services in the previous year.

Depression

is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION IS REDUCING STIGMA

Two years ago, sixteen local organizations came together with the mission to stop the stigma of mental illness so more people will seek the help they need..

The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition launched a media campaign titled *Join the Conversation* and created a website letstalkstigma.org to increase awareness about stigma and get people talking about mental illness, health and wellness. This grassroots campaign gives individuals with mental illness a voice and promotes positive language about mental illness.

To mark the success of *Join the Conversation*, a membership meeting and celebration will be held on Tuesday, May 14 from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. at WNED studios in downtown Buffalo. Everyone who has taken the pledge is invited to attend. Please RSVP by May 6. Event sponsors are Deaf Access Services and WNED/WBFO. People who have taken the pledge to end to stigma and other interested community members will learn about the results of the campaign and hear about plans for the future. A panel discussion about overcoming mental health challenges will feature campaign spokespersons Jenna Luehrsen, Dan Lukasik, Karl Shallowhorn, Allison Schroeder, and Annika Thomas.

"Join the Conversation is making great strides as more people engage on social media and take the pledge to end stigma," Max Donatelli, Chairman, Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition. "We are excited to provide an update on the campaign and share plans for the coming year." According to Donatelli, during the past year, representatives from *Join the Conversation* have presented to school groups and community organizations and participated in several health and wellness fairs. This month, a panel discussion will be held at Erie County Medical Center to educate hospital staff about mental illness stigma and wellness.

Studies indicate that one in five people will experience mental illness in their lifetimes and stigma often prevents them from speaking up and seeking help. LetsTalkStigma.org provides real life stories, identifies myths versus facts, provides resources, and to get our community talking about mental illness. Erie County, the Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation and the Patrick P. Lee Foundation provide funding for the campaign.



The Department of Mental Health is by law responsible to plan, administer, and coordinate a countywide integrated system of comprehensive community based mental health, developmental disability, chemical dependency, and children's system of care programs/services to address the treatment and recovery needs of at risk individuals.

In addition, the ECDMH Children's Division/ Single Point of Access (C-SPOA) serves to identify, screen, and assign to evidence based or other intensive services to eligible high need/high risk children and youth with a serious emotional disturbance (SED) and/or behavioral disorder, and/or their family members with multi-system involvement who are experiencing a level of impaired functioning that places a child/youth at-risk of out of home care. While the ECDMH Single Point of Access (A-SPOA), facilitates community collaboration for and provides referrals to critical care coordination and housing services for high risk individuals with mental health and/or co-occurring substance use disorders.

We recently spoke with Michael Ranney, CRC-R, LMHC Commissioner of Mental Health for Erie County, about mental health in our community.

Q: WHAT ARE THE MOST URGENT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN ERIE COUNTY?

Increasing services for people with co-occurring conditions of mental illness, addiction, intellectual or developmental

disability. Additionally, provider workforce retention of clinical staff and physicians is always a concern.

More affordable housing in the community is necessary so people are able to transition out of the service system. This would then allow high need individuals access to the housing services.

Assisting those with mental health conditions who are involved in the criminal justice system is another priority. We continue to focus on diversion efforts, jail mental health programming, and community reintegration by way of reentry services.

Increasing employment opportunities for people with mental illness is needed.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT THE CITIZENS OF ERIE COUNTY CAN HELP THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS THAT MAY EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES?

We need to be willing to ask them how they are, how they have been feeling and be willing to listen. If they express concern that they have been feeling down or anxious to the point they have not been able to function we need to assist them in getting help as they likely are struggling with a mental health issue.

Q: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Stigma can create barriers and prevents people from getting help. We need to pledge and join together to end stigma that surrounds mental illness. As a community need to understand that mental illness is a health condition. We need to seek help if we don't feel well and see a doctor if we experience physical pain. We also need to be able and willing to get help if we are having emotional difficulties and experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.

These symptoms may indicate depression, particularly when they last for more than two weeks:

- Reaching out and letting them know you are available to help
- Helping them access mental health services
- Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn't true
- Treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else
- Refusing to define them by their diagnosis or using labels such as "crazy"

Welcome to Our Newest Members





Mental Health Awareness Day



Raising Resilient Children in Challenging Times: A Suicide Prevention Program



Mental Health First Aid Training



Mental Health First Aid Training



Celebrating the Success of Join the Conversation: An Exclusive Member Event



Understanding School's Role When Bullying Occurs



Mental Health First Aid



Soul Shop: Ministering to Faith Communities Affected by Suicide



The Erie County Children's System of Care Annual Dinner and Celebration: Children's Mental Health Awareness Day



Embracing Discomfort: Learning How to Effectively Treat Anxiety Disorders

To see a full list of events for the month of May, please visit, LetsTalkStigma.org

ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

FOUNDING MEMBERS

- BryLin Behavioral Health System
- Children's Mental Health Coalition of WNY, Inc.
- Community Partners of WNY
- Compeer
- Crisis Services of Erie County
- Erie County Department of Mental Health
- Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
- Fellows Action Network
- Fuerst Consulting Corp.
- Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
- Mental Health Advocates of WNY
- Millennium Collaborative Care
- Patrick P. Lee Foundation
- Preventionfocus, Inc.
- Telesco Creative Group
- Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation