



## Mental Illness Stigma Common for Cancer Survivors

As of January 2019, the National Cancer Institute estimated that there were 16.9 million cancer survivors in the United States. By 2030, this number of cancer survivors is projected to increase to 22.2 million.

Along with serious physical challenges, mental health challenges accompany a cancer diagnosis, treatment and beyond. Addressing the mental health aspect is often overlooked.

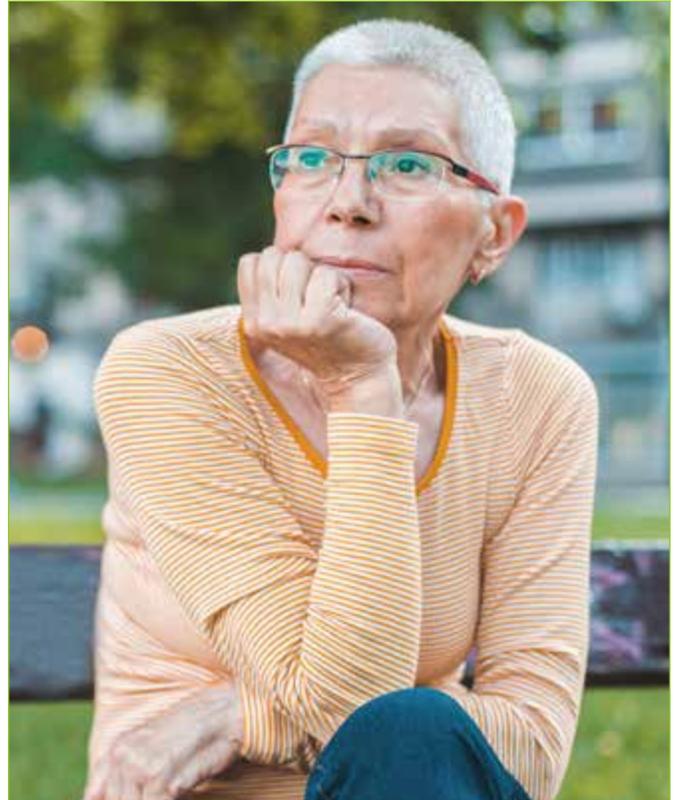
Kathleen Maxian, cancer survivor and president of the Ovarian Cancer Project, says the mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety, are common for cancer survivors.

The Ovarian Cancer Project offers education on the symptoms and risk factors of ovarian cancer and provides support services to women with ovarian and gynecologic cancer and their families.

*"There is nothing better than talking to someone who is going through what you are going through," Maxian said. "It is really an uplift and they feel as if they are not alone."*

A 2020 State of Cancer Survivorship Survey conducted by the National Coalition of Cancer Survivors (NCCS) revealed that cancer survivors face significant challenges both during and after treatment.

The study also indicated that while the cancer care team effectively addresses many of the physical effects of cancer treatment, survivors reported that their care team is not as helpful addressing other effects of their cancer, including fatigue, anxiety, and depression.



*"The media tells cancer survivors that they are warriors and need to be courageous and brave," Maxian said. "They are sideswiped by a cancer diagnosis, may be experiencing financial stress and don't know where to go for help. The entire family is also impacted by a diagnosis."*

Cancer coaches and mentoring can be extremely important, especially cancer-specific mentors. Maxian suggests national organizations that focus on a particular cancer may be a good place to start to locate mental health services and support.

She encourages cancer survivors not to let the stigma of the word "support group" prevent them from participating. "It really helps lessen the anxiety; it's OK to reach out for help."

The American Cancer Society suggests that survivors talk about feelings and fears that they or family members have, seeking help through support groups and counseling, using mindfulness, prayer, meditation, deep breathing and relaxation.

*Continued on Page 2*

*"When we put so much emphasis on completing treatment and surviving, we feel we are not allowed to talk about the mental struggles," Maxian said. "Family members often don't want to talk about it and dismiss the topic of death or fear."*

How can caregivers provide mental health support?:

The CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) offers the following advice:

Be sensitive to your loved one's feelings and encourage him or her to talk about them with you and other family members and friends.

Encourage your loved one to join a support group.

Ask your loved one's doctor for a referral to mental health and social support services.

Help your loved one stay as active as possible. Physical activity has been linked to lower rates of depression, as well as lower rates of recurrence of certain kinds of cancer, among survivors.

American Psychosocial Oncology Society operates a toll-free helpline (866-276-7443) to assist people with cancer and their caregivers to find counseling services in their local areas.

Crisis Hotline in Buffalo & Erie County can be reached at 716-834-3131.

Learn more at [ovariancancerproject.org](http://ovariancancerproject.org). ■

## HOW CAN CAREGIVERS PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT?

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[WWW.CDC.GOV](http://WWW.CDC.GOV)



## A Story of Cancer Survival and Mental Wellness

*Jessica C. Pirro, LMSW, chief executive officer of Crisis Services and co-chair of the Anti-Stigma Coalition, shares her story of cancer survival and mental wellness.*

We all have different response levels to stress. How we respond also is biological, including our own trauma histories as individuals. Some responses are short lived, some are longer, and some become part of our day to day. We have to learn the best coping skills to manage impacts on our mental health.

Overall, I have had a wonderful life. I am extremely lucky to have support of a loving family, an amazing job that gives me purpose and—99% of the time—a positive outlook on life. Although I have had my life's challenges including divorce, minor medical issues, a past abusive relationship, I came through with determination, support and love from those around me.

When I look at my mental health, I always felt strong except with what I referred to as situational anxiety, resulting from public speaking. I remember the first presentation in school I had to do as a kid vividly to this day. Feelings I couldn't control or had experienced until that moment.

My voice quivering to the point that I was on the verge of tears. My heart pounding and now realized it was anxiety that took over.

Continued on Page 3

# A Story of Cancer Survival and Mental Wellness Continued from Page 2

This paralyzing feeling was something I learned to expect and knew I needed to work on. Although presenting and public speaking is part of my day to day work, that anxiety is always under the surface. I have learned techniques to keep it in check to help me succeed.

But, then something changed that brought this situational anxiety to generalized anxiety in my life.

The day I was diagnosed with cancer. Who would have thought the words “I have cancer” would come from my lips. My family health history was impacted by heart disease. It was known and to be expected. I worked to limit my health risks so my genetics didn’t take over. There was no family history of cancer. I never thought it would impact me.

Then I went for my annual mammogram that was routine for many years. This year was different.

The first mammogram, a second mammogram, an ultrasound, to “we found something,” to biopsy within hours was a whirlwind. My husband quickly rushed to the appointment to meet me and we stood in the lobby stunned.

This was a Thursday and the results would take several days. So, we sat. I sat with all the unknowns that compound into anxiety I have never felt before. A space that fluctuated from despair to anger to determination to fight. The mixed level of feelings that this diagnosis brings instantly becomes a part of you and doesn’t leave.

As I went through surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, I saw anxiety becoming a part of who I was now going to be. I had to learn to allow myself the ability to accept it, know it, tackle it

or let it take over in the moment as needed for my well-being. I was managing this daily during my yearlong treatment.

*Some days are better than others. The rush of heat, the redness on my neck, difficulty breathing or being overtaken with emotion in a moment’s notice became my norm.*

People see you surviving and fighting this disease. They are excited when your treatment is done. You get comments from others such as “Aren’t you so excited to be done?” or “you beat it.”

Dealing with all I have and will deal with, my response was always “Yes, I am done with treatment, but my healing is just beginning.”

And that healing continues. The difference with this, unlike my fears with public speaking, it is now innate in my being.

As a 3-year survivor, I view and manage this differently with each passing year. I see this as my body telling when it needs care. When my mind needs to rest and a reminder that healing is a process. I have moved from trying to stop the feelings to just holding on to them differently. This is a part of me now.

I always have concern of reoccurrence present in my mind. But I celebrate the days I don’t think about it or the moments I forget I had cancer. That is my body giving me moments of reprieve from the underlining anxiety that will always be.

*I truly honor anyone managing anxiety every day. Acceptance to this happening helps me breathe easier and helps me move forward, some days better than others.*

ERIE COUNTY  
**ANTI-STIGMA**  
COALITION

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**Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:**

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

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# A Q&A with Amherst Chamber of Commerce

The Amherst Chamber of Commerce has a 60 year tradition of responding to the diverse needs of the business community.

We recently spoke with **Director of Marketing & Operations, Christine Langenfeld.**



## Why did your organization become a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition?

*The Amherst Chamber prides itself on providing solutions and resources for our Western NY region. Collaboration and alliance can further advance initiatives of our members. We value these partnerships, and the Anti-Stigma Coalition has important, relevant, and pressing challenges for the community at large; this includes the business community. Support for such an important topic was an easy decision. Making the pledge was quick and easy, and we look forward to contributing to the conversation.*

## How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

*Stigma does exist, but with the commitment of these insightful co-members of the Anti-Stigma Coalition, we can work together to improve the discussion and lead by example. We do so much to take care of our physical health, so it's time for self-care with our mental health. De-stigmatizing the topic by sharing the stories, supporting the mission and ensuring (from a business perspective) to provide the tools and resources for mental wellness within the business community is essential.*

## What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

*Although mental wellness has always been an important issue, the pandemic has increased stressors for the entire population. We can't let any progress go by the wayside. The campaign has united businesses of various industries to come together and offer a platform to actually talk about these sensitive issues. Communication is key in any wellness initiative. We have committed to enhance our offerings for our members and have worked with Horizon Health, Independent Health and Financial Partners of Upstate New York for a three-part Wellness Series that will run October – December. Visit [Amherst.org](http://Amherst.org) for more information. ■*



## BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at [letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge](http://letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge).

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at [kshallowhorn@chcb.net](mailto:kshallowhorn@chcb.net).

## FACEBOOK LIVE: BACK IN SESSION—THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR



The Anti-Stigma Coalition hosted a Facebook live event on October 8 to help parents, teachers and students navigate the new school year. Danielle Eadie, Clinical Director of Counseling Services at Daemen College, and Ka'Shara Jordan, Social Worker in the Niagara Falls School District, led the discussion on managing fear and uncertainty this school year and offered strategies for good mental health.

One suggestion provided by Jordan was to take things one day at a time. "Parents need to realize we are in a pandemic and it is all new to us," she said. "You don't have to have it all figured out."

More than 1,000 people tuned in to participate in the discussion. You can view the complete program at The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition's [Facebook Page](#) or visit [letstalkstigma.org/facebook-live-back-in-session/](https://letstalkstigma.org/facebook-live-back-in-session/).

## November Events

NOVEMBER 3 & 17

Headway's Virtual Support Groups

NOVEMBER 5

Buffalo Blues Benefit for WNY Gold Star Mothers

NOVEMBER 16 THROUGH 22

DAS Annual Virtual Fundraiser

NOVEMBER 21

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

VETERANS ONE-STOP  
CENTER OF WNY EVENTS

During these unpredictable times, visit our events page at  
**[LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS](https://letstalkstigma.org/events)**  
For information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care.

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



Visit [letstalkstigma.org/current-members](https://letstalkstigma.org/current-members) for more information on our current members.



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

Hear Veterans who have experienced depression talk about the various sources of support that help them live more fulfilling lives. Visit this link to learn more:

[www.maketheconnection.net/conditions/depression?utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=october\\_monthly\\_10.15&utm\\_term=header\\_image\\_page&utm\\_content=whatsnew\\_views\\_all\\_null](https://www.maketheconnection.net/conditions/depression?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=october_monthly_10.15&utm_term=header_image_page&utm_content=whatsnew_views_all_null)