



Mental Wellness and Self-Care in the New Year

Before the start of the pandemic, one in five Americans lived with a diagnosable mental health condition. These rates have skyrocketed as individuals from all walks of life have experienced disruption and insecurity in their lives due to the collective trauma caused by this experience.

*One CDC study reveals that more than two in five U.S. residents report struggling with mental or behavioral health issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including anxiety, depression, increased substance use, and suicidal thoughts.**

“As we enter the New Year, it is important to remember that our mental health is a critical component of facing the challenging days ahead,” says Karl Shallowhorn, chair of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition. “By doing so, we can support one another and establish healthy practices that support our overall well-being.”

Adam Giancarlo, LCSW, offers the three actions that can improve mental health. First, seek therapy, a valuable tool for anyone and everyone (again, depending on the circumstances). It has been shown to be highly effective in promoting the kinds of changes that people want or need to make in their lives, and those who engage in therapy tend to be in a much better position for experiencing positive outcomes and improvement in various life areas.

“Second, there is a very strong link between physical health and mental/emotional health and well-being. Eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, taking medications as prescribed, and staying current with regular/annual physical exams/check-ups as well as getting regular bloodwork done are very important. When it comes to sleep, sleep hygiene is very important – going to bed at a reasonable time, trying

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to keep somewhat of a regular routine or schedule, avoiding excessive caffeine and/or screen-time prior to bedtime,” Giancarlo said.

According to Giancarlo, the third suggestion is establishing, building, and maintaining a strong and healthy support network which is vital to improving mental health. Utilizing one’s social structure of friends, family, coworkers, employer, clergy or spiritual advisors, and self-help/mutual aid support groups and peer supports can be very valuable and effective when it comes to establishing and maintaining good, positive mental and emotional health and well-being.

Self-care is one of the best ways to make mental wellness a priority and the new year is a great time to make it part of your daily routine.

What is self-care? The World Health Organization defines self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.

“Self-care improves mental health in every way possible,” Lindsay Herndon, LMHC, Associate VP of Outpatient Services, BryLin Behavioral Health System. “Self-care is not selfish,” Herndon said. “It has been a very difficult time as we have had to wear different hats – parent, co-worker, teacher. You are no good to anyone if you don’t take care of yourself.”

She suggests keeping self-care simple. Some ideas are getting fresh air, finding a hobby like painting, working out, or simply taking a bath.

According to Lisa Prefontaine, M.S. LMHC, self-care requires the commitment to take care of yourself as much as you take care of others. This allows you to be there for others in the way that you want. Self-care helps you to concentrate, increases energy levels, and most importantly, reduces stress which can be a trigger for depression and anxiety.

Mental wellness requires a commitment to taking care of yourself with strategies such as mindfulness, saying no when you need to, and knowing what your limits are, taking time to get your mind off what worries you, and exercising in any way you are able to.

“This past year has shown us that we need one another to cope and thrive through difficult times. My hope is that this in itself has helped de-stigmatize the concept that mental health and substance use issues are of humanity, not of personal choice,” Prefontaine said.

“It wasn’t so long ago that people feared those living with cancer and HIV, and with knowledge, we have come to understand the disease underlying,” she said. “The brain is an organ, just as a heart which when stressed, becomes compromised with illness such as high blood pressure or cholesterol, when the brain is stressed it becomes compromised with anxiety and depression and can become dependent on substances or alcohol to cope,” she said.

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HABITS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH?

EXERCISE DAILY.

Exercise can take many forms, such as taking the stairs whenever possible, walking up escalators, and running and biking rather than driving.

EAT WELL.

Eating mainly unprocessed foods like whole grains, vegetables and fresh fruit is key to a healthy body.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP.

Adults generally need between seven and nine hours of sleep. A brief nap—up to 30 minutes—can help you feel alert again during the day. Even 15 minutes of daytime sleep is helpful.

AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS.

They don’t actually reduce stress and often worsen it.

PRACTICE RELAXATION EXERCISES.

Deep breathing, meditation and progressive muscle relaxation are easy, quick ways to reduce stress.

With continued knowledge and understanding, these symptoms can be treated just like any other symptom of the body. The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition is committed to ending the stigma of mental illness so everyone in our community can get the help they need. Everyone is invited to take the *Pledge to End Stigma* (it's free) and create a new dialogue about mental health. Explore the website and discover stories of friends and neighbors who have experienced mental illness, recovered, and are living full lives. ■

*www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm

January Events

JANUARY 11

Down Syndrome Parents Group

JANUARY 13

Erie Family & Caregiver Group for
Parents of Children with Autism

JANUARY 13

Charla Con Nosotros With Lizarelis Ali

JANUARY 13

Free Adult Mental Health First Aid Training

JANUARY 14

Buffalo Family & Caregivers Chat
With Kim Hernandez & Lizarelis Ali

JANUARY 19

Headway's Virtual Support Groups and
Caregiver Virtual Support Groups

JANUARY 26

Structure, Routine and Strategies during COVID-19

JANUARY 27

Free Adult Mental Health First Aid Training

JANUARY

Senior Companion "Phone Connection"
Program Accepting Recipients

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER



Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for
more information on our current members.

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

During these unpredictable times, visit our events page at
LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS
For information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

A Q&A with Buffalo Toronto Public Media

Buffalo Toronto Public Media is a trusted public media resource that enriches its audiences by providing educational, entertaining programming and services, as well as engaging the Western New York and Southern Ontario communities through cultural and civic involvement.



We recently spoke with **Beth Fronckowiak, Director of Education and Outreach for Buffalo Toronto Public Media**, about how the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition is having an impact in the community.

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

Buffalo Toronto Public Media joined the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition because we recognize the importance of mental health. As public media, we are obligated to raise awareness of important issues to leave our community better informed. At Buffalo Toronto Public Media, we have an ongoing initiative dedicated to mental health. There have been many stories on WBFO, including recently how COVID has impacted mental health, and we plan to incorporate community conversations in the near future.

How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

People with mental health challenges are impacted by stigma in a number of significant ways. One of the biggest is recognition and self-recognition of a mental health issue. If mental health challenges are not recognized by friends and family and even

the person themselves, then treatment and support will not happen. Buffalo Toronto Public Media, along with the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition, realizes that if we increase awareness, understanding and acceptance for those living with mental health challenges that will lead to help and support.

What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition is offering valuable, real resources for our community to learn more and understand mental health challenges. Buffalo Toronto Public Media fully supports and applauds the work of the Coalition and joined them to broaden the reach of the much needed information. The station has been focused on sharing information about mental health on air and social media platforms for a few years now. Participation in live social media events has been significant. Our hope is that our community can learn more about mental illness and that understanding will help to stop the stigma. ■



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.

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.