



### MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

# Don't Neglect Your Mental Health

This past year presented so many different challenges and obstacles that tested our strength and resiliency. The global pandemic forced us to cope with situations we never even imagined, and a lot of us struggled with our mental health as a result. The good news is that there are tools and resources available that can support the well-being of individuals and communities.

Now, more than ever, we need to combat the stigma surrounding mental health concerns.

- The average share of adults reporting symptoms of anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder has jumped **from 11% in January 2019 to 41% in January 2021.**
- The number of people reporting anxiety symptoms has tripled and depression symptoms have quadrupled during the pandemic with black Americans shouldering the heaviest burden.

- More than 50% of Americans now meet the clinical definition of anxiety disorder or depression.

That's why this Mental Health Month, The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition is highlighting #Tools2Thrive – what individuals can do throughout their daily lives to prioritize mental health, build resiliency, and continue to cope with the obstacles of COVID-19.

*"The core mission of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition is to raise awareness about mental health and let people know that it's okay to talk about their emotional wellbeing, especially if they find themselves struggling," said Karl Shallowhorn, chair. "Our goal is to combat the harmful effects of stigma that contribute to discrimination, misperceptions and the unfounded fears associated with mental illness."*

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Throughout the pandemic, many people who had never experienced mental health challenges found themselves struggling for the first time. During the month of May, we are focusing on different topics that can help process the events of the past year and the feelings that surround them, while also building up skills and supports that extend beyond COVID-19.

The past year forced many to accept tough situations that they had little to no control over. If you found that it impacted your mental health, you aren't alone. In fact, of the almost half a million individuals that took the anxiety screening online, 79% showed symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety. However, there are practical tools that can help improve your mental health. We are focused on managing anger and frustration, recognizing when trauma may be affecting your mental health, challenging negative thinking patterns, and making time to take care of yourself.

It's important to remember that working on your mental health and finding tools that help you thrive takes time. Change won't happen overnight. Instead, by focusing on small changes, you can move through the stressors of the past year and develop long-term strategies to support yourself on an ongoing basis.

A great starting point for anyone who is ready to start prioritizing their mental health is to take a mental health screening at [mhawny.org/screening](https://mhawny.org/screening). It's a quick, free, and confidential way for someone to assess their mental health and begin finding hope and healing.

Ultimately, during this month of May, the Anti-Stigma Coalition wants to remind everyone that mental illnesses are real, and recovery is possible. By developing your own #Tools2Thrive, it is possible to find balance between life's ups and downs and continue to cope with the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

For more information, visit [mhanational.org/tools-2-thrive](https://mhanational.org/tools-2-thrive). ■

## MENTAL HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL TO EVERYONE'S OVERALL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, AND MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE COMMON AND TREATABLE.

While *1 IN 5 PEOPLE* will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, *EVERYONE* faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on the mental health of people of all ages, and *NOW MORE THAN EVER IT IS CRITICAL TO REDUCE THE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES* that commonly prevents individuals from seeking help.

There are *PRACTICAL TOOLS* that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency, regardless of the situations they are dealing with.

Knowing when to *TURN TO FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND CO-WORKERS* when you are struggling with life's challenges can help improve your mental health.

One way to check in with yourself is to *TAKE A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN*. It's a quick, free, and private way for someone to assess their mental health and recognize signs of mental health problems.

Living a healthy lifestyle and incorporating mental health tools to thrive may not be easy but can be achieved by *GRADUALLY MAKING SMALL CHANGES AND BUILDING ON THOSE SUCCESSES*.

Seeking professional help when self-help efforts to improve your mental health aren't working is *A SIGN OF STRENGTH, NOT WEAKNESS*.

## A Q&A with Open Buffalo

Open Buffalo is a civic initiative to make major, long-term improvements in justice and equity in the City of Buffalo. It is an unprecedented collaboration among a diverse group of partners and allies. The organization's mission is to advance racial, economic, and ecological justice through skill building, network connecting, and activating leadership opportunities. The goal is for all communities in Western New York to thrive free from discrimination and poverty. We recently spoke with **Max Anderson, deputy director**, about stigma and the work of the Open Buffalo and the Coalition.

### MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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

*Open Buffalo's mission is to advance racial, economic, and ecological justice. We do so through skill building, network connecting, and activating leadership opportunities. Our goal is for all communities in Western New York to thrive free from discrimination and poverty. Most of our organization's staff, and the populations we serve, have directly faced some form of systemic injustice and oppression. In many cases, these traumatic life experiences are the very things that motivate us to work towards long-term, systemic improvements in our community. At the same time, we realize that so many of our people carry unaddressed trauma in their bodies, having negative impacts on our mental health and our ability to show up as the best versions of ourselves. Resources like the Anti-Stigma Coalition are critical. Overcoming the barriers that stand in the way of our people taking care of their mental health is essential to us reaching our full potential and creating the change that we want to see in Buffalo and Western New York.*

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

*Among communities of color and other marginalized groups, there is an intense stigma tied to working on one's mental health. We often wear our toughness and ability to endure trauma as badges of honor. To many of us, seeking help for mental health goes directly against this cultural standard and the lessons that are instilled in us during our formative years. Left unaddressed — whether because of embarrassment, shame, or cultural expectations — mental health challenges can fester, grow, and impact others in one's family or immediate circle.*

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

*The Campaign is helping to demystify mental health care and to let people throughout our region know that it's not only OK, but essential, to address our mental health. ■*



## 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).

# May Events

May 3

Caregiving Solutions & Resources  
*Horizon Health Services*

May 6 - 13

WNY Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

May 18

ASL Classes - ONLINE  
*Deaf Access Services*

May 18

Faith-Based Approach to Mental Wellness  
*St. Joseph's University Parish*

May 19

Adult Mental Health First Aid - Virtual  
*Community Health Center of Buffalo*

May 25

33rd Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day  
*Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York*

**More Events & Information:**

Visit [letstalkstigma.org/events](http://letstalkstigma.org/events)



## MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN

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Take a mental health screen:  
[mhawny.org/screening](http://mhawny.org/screening)

## MHA OF WNY SUPPORT GROUPS

May 4, 16 Headway's Virtual Peer & Caregiver Support Group

May 5, 12, 19, 26 Teen Peer Support Group

May 7, 21 20-Something Online Support Group

May 13, 27 Online Family Support Groups

## PEOPLE, INC. PROGRAMS

Senior Companion "Phone Connection"  
Program Accepting Recipients  
*Contact: 716.768.2381*

Affordable Apartments Accepting Applications  
*Contact: Email [housing@people-inc.org](mailto:housing@people-inc.org) or call 716.880.3890*

Senior Living Apartments Accepting Applications  
*Contact: Email [Seniorliving@people-inc.org](mailto:Seniorliving@people-inc.org) or call 716.817.9090*

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER



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

ERIE COUNTY  
**ANTI-STIGMA**  
COALITION

### 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