



WHAT HEALTH PROVIDERS AND ORGANIZATIONS Need to Know About Wellness



Why Is Wellness Important?

One of the greatest risks for people with mental health and substance use disorders is premature death resulting from cardiovascular disease and other preventable illnesses. The Federal Government has spearheaded a major cross-agency, public/private initiative to transform delivery of the Nation’s mental health and substance use services into a system based on the expectation of recovery. Through its Wellness Initiative, SAMHSA envisions a future in which people with mental health and substance use challenges pursue optimal health, happiness, recovery, and a full and satisfying life in the community via access to a range of effective services, supports, and resources.

The co-occurrence of chronic medical disorders and complex health needs has become an expectation, not an exception, for people with mental health and substance use disorders. Premature mortality among this population is predominantly due to preventable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, congestive heart failure, and coronary heart disease. In addition, medications have been known to cause weight gain, high-blood pressure and cholesterol, and glucose metabolism, all of which are symptoms that can contribute to the development of chronic diseases.¹ Several lifestyle factors of people with mental health and substance use disorders compound the risk of this disease, including a high-fat and high-calorie diet, a lack of exercise, smoking, and substance use.²

People with mental health and substance use disorders have a higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome, liver disease, hypertension, and dental disorders than the general population. These individuals also have poor weight management/nutrition, and physical inactivity. They also have been found to have the lowest rate of using of preventive medicine and self-care.³

Some of the greatest risk factors leading to premature death among this population are trauma, social isolation, lack of access to quality and culturally attuned health care, smoking, obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and the effects of medication. All of these factors contribute to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and other preventable conditions among people with mental health and substance use disorders.⁴

Deanne, a person with lived experience, gained support from a community organization in her personal recovery from mental illness. Through community organization **9Muses Art Center** in Broward County, FL, Deanne uncovered how art allowed her to express herself and connect with others over a shared activity. Through her exploration of art, Deanne found a true passion and joy and now works at a new consumer center teaching arts and crafts.⁵

SAMHSA's Wellness Initiative Objectives

- To increase public awareness about the premature death of people with mental health and substance use disorders due to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, lung disease, and other contributing factors, including trauma, social isolation, unemployment, poverty, and inadequate health care.
- To provide educational resources, tools, and technical assistance that are guided by the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and motivate people to make healthier lifestyle choices (e.g., smoking freedom, nutritious foods, exercise, social connections, spirituality, creative or intellectual endeavors).
- To mobilize individuals, family members, peer providers, health care providers, community- and faith-based organizations, government agencies, and institutions (e.g., homeless shelters, jails, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities) around the pursuit of wellness as part of recovery and essential for a healthy, full, and satisfying life in the community.
- To ensure that all of our outreach strategies, messages, resources, and program tools are person-directed, strength-based, trauma-informed, and culturally relevant.

How Can Providers and Organizations Promote Wellness?

Behavioral health and primary care providers caring for patients with mental health and substance use disorders should collaborate in order to work toward optimal wellness. They can also partner with peer organizations in the community to work one-on-one with people with mental health and substance use disorders and help them take steps to improve their wellness.

- **Chestnut Health System**, a nonprofit behavioral health care group in Illinois, hosted a Wellness Fair during National Wellness Week to teach attendees—clients and staff—about exercise, nutrition, relaxation, financial wellness, smoking cessation, stress reduction, and much more.
- **The Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation**, a research, training, and service organization for persons with psychiatric needs demonstrated how standing qigong exercises promote and maintain fitness.
- **Meaningful Minds** in Louisiana advocates for individuals with mental health, substance abuse, and addictive disorders. To recognize National Wellness Week, the Statewide organization held a tree planting event at a local State hospital that treats people with behavioral health disorders.
- **Bienestar-VIP Community Services** in New York hosted a “Movie and Healthy Snacks” night during National Wellness Week to encourage people to spend time together in activities they enjoy. The organization supports members of the community who are recovering from substance abuse.

Take the Pledge for Wellness

Through its Wellness Initiative, SAMHSA pledges to promote wellness for people with mental health and substance use disorders by motivating individuals, organizations, and communities to take action and work toward improved quality of life, cardiovascular health, and decreased early mortality rates.

Join us. Sign the Pledge for Wellness and learn more:
www.samhsa.gov/wellness.

Additional Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Wellness Initiative aims to inspire individuals to improve one physical health behavior while exploring their talents, skills, interests, social connections, and environment to incorporate other dimensions of wellness. Visit www.samhsa.gov/wellness for materials and to take the **Pledge for Wellness**.

FDA Office of Women's Health
www.fda.gov/womens

Million Hearts™
www.millionhearts.hhs.gov

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.hhs.gov

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation
www.bu.edu/cpr

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
1-800-950-NAMI (1-800-950-6264)
www.nami.org

The National Empowerment Center
1-800-POWER2U (1-800-769-3728)
www.power2u.org

The National Wellness Institute
www.nationalwellness.org

healthfinder®
www.healthfinder.gov

Faces & Voices of Recovery
www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

ENDNOTES

1. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. (2006). *Measurement of Health Status for People with Serious Mental Illness*.
2. Eldridge, D., Dawber, N., and Gray, R. (2011). A well-being support program for patients with severe mental illness: a service evaluation. *BMC Psychiatry*, 11(46). Retrieved from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-244X/11/46>
3. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. (2008).
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2011). *SAMHSA's Wellness Initiative FY 2011*.
5. Deanne's Story. *SAMHSA's Resource Center to Promote Acceptance, Dignity and Social Inclusion Associated with Mental Health (ADS Center)*. Retrieved from http://stopstigma.samhsa.gov/publications/mystory/story_deanne.aspx.

