

About Mental Illness National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Mental illnesses include such disorders as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic and other severe anxiety disorders, autism and pervasive developmental disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, borderline personality disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illnesses that affect the brain.

These disorders can profoundly disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, moods, ability to relate to others and capacity for coping with the demands of life.

Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing.

Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people with serious mental illness need medication to help control symptoms, but also rely on supportive counseling, self-help groups, assistance with housing, vocational rehabilitation, income assistance and other community services in order to achieve their highest level of recovery.

Here are some important facts about mental illness and recovery:

- Mental illnesses are biologically based brain disorders. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's "character" or intelligence.
- Mental disorders fall along a continuum of severity. The most serious and disabling conditions affect five to ten million adults (2.6 – 5.4%) and three to five million children ages five to seventeen (5 – 9%) in the United States.
- Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability (lost years of productive life) in the North America, Europe and, increasingly, in the world. By 2020, Major Depressive illness will be the leading cause of disability in the world for women and children.
- Mental illnesses strike individuals in the prime of their lives, often during adolescence and young adulthood. All ages are susceptible, but the young and the old are especially vulnerable.
- Without treatment the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering: unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives; The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than 100 billion dollars each year in the United States.
- The best treatments for serious mental illnesses today are highly effective; between 70 and 90 percent of individuals have significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life with a combination of pharmacological and psychosocial treatments and supports;
- Early identification and treatment is of vital importance; By getting people the treatment they need early, recovery is accelerated and the brain is protected from further harm related to the course of illness.
- Stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are real, treatable health conditions. We have allowed stigma and a now unwarranted sense of hopelessness to erect attitudinal, structural and financial barriers to effective treatment and recovery. It is time to take these barriers down.

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