



WHAT HEALTH PROVIDERS AND ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WELLNESS

Why Is Wellness Important?

Individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) served by the public mental health system die, on average, **years earlier than the general population**, with heart disease being the prime culprit.ⁱ

That's why the federal government spearheaded an initiative to **decrease the risk factors leading to premature death** among this population.

Through its Wellness Initiative, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is working toward a future in which people with behavioral health conditions receive **effective treatment, services, supports, and resources** that are based on the expectation of recovery.

The following factors contribute to the increased risk for heart disease and other preventable conditions among individuals with behavioral health conditions:

- **Poverty, social isolation, and trauma:** Nearly 32 percent of people with behavioral health conditions live below the poverty line.ⁱⁱ Many also experience social isolation and trauma, which can lead to higher levels of stress.
- **Lack of access to quality health care:** A high percentage of people with behavioral health conditions are unemployed, and many lack health insurance coverage.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Psychopharmaceutical effects:** Many of the medications that treat the SMI population have been known to cause weight gain, as well as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, all of which increase the risk factors for heart disease.^{iv, v, vi}
- **Substance use:** Heavy and binge drinking is associated with numerous health issues, including damage to liver cells, inflammation of the pancreas, various cancers, high blood pressure, and psychological disorders.^{vii}



WELLNESS

Source: Adapted from Swarbrick, M. (2006). A Wellness Approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 29(4), 311-314.



- **Tobacco:** Seventy-five percent of people with behavioral health conditions smoke cigarettes (compared to 23 percent of the general population).^{viii} Half of all deaths from smoking occur among people with mental or substance use disorders.^{ix}
- **Obesity:** Obesity is frequently accompanied by diagnosed depression, and the two can trigger and influence each other.^x

How Is SAMHSA's Wellness Initiative Helping?

INITIATIVE OBJECTIVES:

- Increase public awareness about the preventable premature death of people with behavioral health conditions due to heart disease, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, lung disease, and other contributing factors including trauma, social isolation, unemployment, poverty, and inadequate health care.
- 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 and intellectual endeavors).
- Mobilize health care providers, peer providers, individuals, family members, community- and faith-based organizations, government agencies, and institutions (e.g., homeless shelters, jails, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities) to pursue and support wellness as an essential part of recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders and trauma.
- Ensure that SAMHSA's outreach strategies, messages, resources, and program tools are person directed, strengths based, trauma informed, and culturally relevant.

How Can Providers and Organizations Promote Wellness?

Behavioral health and primary care providers caring for individuals with behavioral health conditions can collaborate in order to work toward optimal wellness. They can also partner with community organizations to work one-on-one with people with behavioral health conditions and help them take steps to improve their wellness.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.hhs.gov>

SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions
<http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/>

healthfinder®
<http://www.healthfinder.gov>

Million Hearts®
<http://www.millionhearts.hhs.gov>

STAR Center
<http://www.consumerstar.org>

National Empowerment Center
1-800-POWER2U (1-800-769-3728)
<http://www.power2u.org>

National Wellness Institute
<http://www.nationalwellness.org>

Peerlink National Technical Assistance Program
<http://www.peerlinktac.org>

Training and education on peer support and services is very important for primary care physicians and other medical personnel. This education will help ensure that behavioral health care is provided effectively within systems of care.

ENDNOTES

- i Parks, J., Svendsen, D., Singer, P., & Foti, M. E. (Eds.). (2006). *Morbidity and mortality in people with serious mental illness*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) Medical Directors Council.
- ii Erickson, W., & Lee, C. (2008). *2007 Disability Status Report: United States*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics.
- iii *Ibid.*
- iv Parks, J., Radke, A. Q., & Mazade, N. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Measurement of health status for people with serious mental illness*. Alexandria, VA: NASMHPD Medical Directors Council.
- v Lieberman, J. A., Stroup, T. S., McEvoy, J. P., et al. (2005). Effectiveness of antipsychotic drugs in patients with chronic schizophrenia. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 353(12), 1209-1223. Retrieved from <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa051688>
- vi American Diabetes Association. (2004). Consensus development conference on antipsychotic drugs and obesity and diabetes. *Diabetes Care*, 27(2), 596-601.
- vii Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm#healthProb>
- viii Parks, J., et al. (Eds.). (2006).
- ix National Alliance on Mental Illness. (n.d.). Smoking and mental illness. Retrieved from http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Hearts_and_Minds/Smoking_Cessation/Smoking_and_Mental_Illness.htm
- x American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Mind/body health: Obesity. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/>