



Mental Illness - Why We Care

“People living with mental illness are our neighbors. They are members of our congregations, members of our families; they are everywhere in this country. If we ignore their cries for help, we will be continuing to participate in the anguish from which those cries of help come. A problem of this magnitude will not go away. Because it will not go away and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action.”

– Rosalynn Carter

One in four Americans will experience mental illness in his or her lifetime, including major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and severe anxiety disorders. Many will first turn to their faith community for help or solace.

Mental illnesses are no-fault, biologically based brain disorders which cause disturbances in thinking, feeling and/or relating. Persons living with these disorders deserve the dignity of medical treatment and a wide range of supportive services from mental health care providers and caring congregations.

Though the majority of individuals living with mental illness can successfully be treated, stigma and misinformation continue to be significant barriers to treatment:

- One-third of homeless people in the U.S. experience mental illness.
- Ninety percent of persons who die by suicide have had a diagnosable serious mental illness.*
- There are more people with serious mental illnesses in jails and prisons than in state mental institutions.

*National Institute of Mental Health. (2009). *Suicide in the U.S.: Statistics and Prevention*. July 14, 2009.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

Faith communities can help reduce misinformation, indifference and ridicule of people living with mental illness by educating both youth and adults in their congregations. Families affected by mental illness often wonder, “*Why is this happening to us?*,” which may lead them to question their faith. Educated faith communities can offer emotional, relational and spiritual counseling to persons touched by mental illness, as well as to ensure a place of compassion.

Education and awareness are valuable keys to shattering the silence that surrounds mental illness and the barriers to its treatment. By dispelling myths, ignorance and fear, congregations encourage persons touched by mental illness to share their struggles, to regain hope, to seek treatment and to benefit from the strength of support.

Recovery is possible. Faith communities play a significant role in the healing process by providing a caring community with spiritual connections. Learn all you can; do all you can.

Information adapted from the nami.org Mental Illness Awareness Week resources.

Key Local Mental Health Resources in Pima County, AZ:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI of Southern Arizona), 520-622-5582
- Crisis Response Network, 520-622-6000
- Community Partnership of Southern Arizona--Mental Health First Aid course and behavioral health system information: 520-318-6946 (main line); 866-318-6960 (for TTY Telecommunications Device for the deaf)

More resources available at www.icstucson.org:

- Mental Health Resources for Faith Communities
- Pocket Guide – Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, Pima Co. 2012
- Resources from the April 27, 2012 Mental Illness Conference in Tucson

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