

Mental Illness: Facts and Figures

- Stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are real, treatable health conditions. We have allowed stigma and an unwarranted sense of hopelessness to erect attitudinal, structural, and financial barriers to effective treatment and recovery. It is time to take these barriers down.
- 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. They can profoundly disrupt a person’s ability to think, feel, relate, and work.
- One in four adults – approximately 58 million Americans – experiences a mental-health disorder in a given year. One in 17 lives with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression, or bipolar disorder, and one in 10 children live with a serious mental or emotional disorder.
- Most of us know family members, friends, or acquaintances who have experienced mental-health problems. Severe mental illnesses are “equality opportunity” diseases, occurring in all cultures, races, and socio-economic groups. One-half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three-quarters by age 24.
- Less than one-third of adults and one-half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive mental-health services in a given year.
- 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 each year in the U.S.
- Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Recovery rates for mental illness have nearly the same rate of success as for medical conditions like asthma, cardiovascular disease, and heart disease.
- Individuals with mental illness face an increased risk of having chronic medical conditions. Adults with serious mental illness die 25 years younger than other Americans, largely due to treatable medical conditions.
- Suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in the U.S. and the third leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 years. More than 90% of those who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental disorder. Veterans are twice as likely to die by suicide than their civilian peers in the U.S.
- 24% of state prisoners and 21% of local jail prisoners have a recent history of mental illness.
- Surveys show that over 40% of Americans seeking help with mental-health issues turn first to ministers, priests, and rabbis. A Baylor University study found that the “data give the impression that mental illness, while prevalent within congregations, is also nearly invisible.” In too many church communities, mental illness can be called the “no casserole disease.”
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), including our local chapter, has a partnership with FaithNet, a grassroots network that focuses on issues of faith and mental health.