



MENTAL HEALTH SAMPLE NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Mental illness is very common. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in four adults, approximately 57.7 million Americans, experience some form of a mental health disorder in a given year. One in 17 Americans live with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, major depression, or bipolar disorder, and about one in 10 children live with a serious mental or emotional disorder. Mental illness cuts across every demographic and strikes throughout the lifespan, but particularly in youth; half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begins by age 14, and three-quarters by age 24.

According to the National Mental Health Association, the national unemployment rate for individuals suffering from mental illnesses is approximately 90 percent, and less than 25 percent of people who suffer from schizophrenia receive any vocational assistance at all. The annual economic, indirect cost of mental illnesses is estimated to be \$79 billion. Most of that amount – approximately \$63 billion – reflects the loss of productivity as a result of illnesses.

These statistics raise the question of what state legislators can do to educate their constituents on how to recognize the symptoms of a mental illness and, once diagnosed, how to prevent serious consequences due to an untreated mental illness. State legislators can assist individuals who suffer from mental illnesses become successful functioning adults in their communities by enacting policies that provide business incentives and tax credits to employers who provide training programs, medical support, treatment programs, and workforce development programs for employees who suffer from mental illnesses. For patients who suffer from serious mental illnesses, there are several options to assist them in becoming functioning adults within society.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in addition to medication treatment, psychosocial treatment – such as cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, peer support groups and other community services – can also be components of a treatment plan that assist with recovery. In addition to individual treatment plans, the availability of transportation, diet, exercise, sleep, friends, and meaningful paid or volunteer activities also contribute to mental illness recovery. Every day, people successfully manage mental illness, just as they manage other chronic conditions, such as diabetes. Success rates with appropriate treatment are 60-80 percent, exceeding the treatment success rate for heart disease.

{STATE} legislators have a unique opportunity to help ensure that adults who are suffering from serious mental illnesses have access to the mental health services within their community. Some policies to be considered include:

- Support statewide awareness campaigns and public education programs on how to manage and recognize the symptoms of mental health illnesses;
- Support efforts to educate providers about treatment standards tailored to individual patients;
- Create a state Mental Health Caucus to provide a forum for stake holders to bring awareness to mental health education programs and assist in the development of legislative proposals;
- Protect funding for mental health services and preventative programs to help improve access to mental health services for low income adults, families, and children who are in need of care; and
- Take steps to release eligible mentally ill prisoners, reduce repeat offenses among the mentally ill population, develop alternatives to incarceration, and introduce mental health programming, such as mental health courts and crisis intervention teams within the criminal justice system.

For assistance in locating mental health services in your area, please visit the National Institute of Mental Health's website at: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/getting-help-locate-services/index.shtml>. For more information, please visit my website at {WEBSITE} or contact my office at {PHONE NUMBER}.