



# **STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN MUNICIPALITY TOOLKIT**

*A Collaborative Campaign Against  
The Stigma of Mental Illness in Bergen County*

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## *What is a mental illness?*

Mental illnesses refer to disorders generally characterized by dysregulation of mood, thought, and/or behavior. Mental illness encompasses a variety of disorders ranging from depression and anxiety to substance and alcohol use disorder and bipolar disorder. Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion or income.

## *What is stigma?*

Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment by others. When an individual is labelled by their illness they experience judgment and prejudice. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As a result, stigma is the primary reason individuals do not seek help when they experience symptoms of mental illness.

**For more information on the disease of mental illness, visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)**

## Introduction

The Bergen County **Stigma-Free Campaign** is a county-wide program which aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. We are dedicated to raising awareness of the disease of mental illness and create a culture wherein residents who have the disease feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma.

## Prevalence of Mental Illness

The World Health Organization ranks mental health disorders as the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada. Mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety or alcohol and substance use disorders, are extremely common in America. 1 in 4 adults experience a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year [approximately 61.5 million Americans] and 1 in 17 adults live with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Yet more than half will not seek treatment. *Why?*

Despite its prevalence in our society, mental health still has stigma attached to it.

The primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need is due to the stigma associated with the disease of mental illness. Main reasons cited are shame and fear of judgment from friends, family and co-workers. Such judgment is often rooted in a lack of knowledge or training. It is our goal to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover from disease.



## The Stigma-Free Campaign

Stigma-Free Zones aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma. The County of Bergen and several Bergen County towns have already passed Stigma-Free resolutions.



Establishing Stigma-Free Zones will raise awareness of the local mental health resources available so no resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. Stigma-Free Zones will encourage residents to break down barriers and be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed. The disease of mental illness has the potential to worsen if left untreated and complications arise when individuals do not seek help. It is essential that residents engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.

**Who is involved?** Everyone is involved. This county-wide initiative includes all Bergen County residents, young and old. From bus drivers to school administrators, every community member is a key stakeholder. We want to link all stakeholders to training opportunities and awareness events aimed at increasing public knowledge of the disease of mental illness and knowledge of local resources available to Bergen County residents.

The following pages include a Stigma-Free toolkit for Bergen County towns interested in joining the Stigma-Free Campaign. By passing a Stigma-Free resolution your town will be joining a rapidly growing network of municipalities dedicated to improving the mental health of our Bergen County community.



## Stigma-Free Toolkit

### Joining the Stigma-Free Initiative will:

- Educate residents that mental illness is a disease and must be treated as such
- Raise awareness of the prevalence of mental illness in our community
- Provoke public interest in learning what is "Stigma-Free"
- Providing residents an opportunity to become involved in their community
- Allow people living with the disease to feel supported by their community and thus decrease feelings of isolation and shame
- Link people in need to local mental health resources
- Raise awareness that care is accessible regardless of income

### *Steps to Becoming a Stigma-Free Zone*

- I. Adopt a local Stigma-Free Campaign resolution
  - i. Page 6
- II. Participate in Mental Health First Aid training
  - i. Page 7-8
- III. Form a municipal task force dedicated to propagating Stigma-Free throughout the town
  - i. Page 9
- IV. Place Stigma-Free promotional materials throughout the town, declaring it a Stigma-Free zone
- V. Stigma-Free action plan
  - i. Page 10
- VI. Sample press materials
  - i. Page 11



*If you have questions regarding the Bergen County Stigma-Free Campaign, contact*

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## SAMPLE Stigma-Free Campaign Resolution

**WHEREAS**, the Bergen County Executive and the Board of Chosen Freeholders, along with the Bergen County Department of Health Services, supports the designation of **Stigma-Free Zones** in every municipality, and;

**WHEREAS**, at the June 2013 meeting of the Bergen County Mental Health Board, members of the Board learned from Care Plus NJ staff that the agency was working collaboratively to establish a Stigma Free Zone in Paramus, and;

**WHEREAS**, the members of the Mental Health Board supported the initiative and recognized that the initiative was aligned with the Board's mission to raise awareness of the disease of mental illness, and;

**WHEREAS**, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that 1 in 4 adults experiences mental illness in a given year and 1 in 17 adults live with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression, or bipolar disorder; approximately 20% of youth ages 13 to 18 and 13% of youth ages 8 to 15 experience severe mental disorders in a given year, and;

**WHEREAS**, the stigma associated with the disease of mental illness is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

**WHEREAS**, **Stigma-Free Zones** aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of the disease of mental illness and create a culture wherein residents who have the disease of mental illness feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma and;

**WHEREAS**, promoting awareness that there can be no "health" without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

**WHEREAS**, local resources are available to treat the disease of mental illness so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

**WHEREAS**, establishing **Stigma-Free Zones** will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that [TOWN] recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the County of Bergen in designating [TOWN] as a **Stigma-Free Zone**.



## Mental Health First Aid Training

Bergen County Cares is providing a unique opportunity for Bergen County municipalities to host free Mental Health First Aid training sessions for their employees and residents.

### What is Mental Health First Aid?

- Evidence-based interactive course that spans one 8-hour or two 4-hour sessions
- Teaches students the signs of mental illness and substance abuse
- Introduces a five-step action plan to initiate referral to mental health resources

### Why is Mental Health First Aid important?

- Just like CPR, it is a vital skill that improves the well-being of our community
- Helps to eliminate stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse
- Promotes recovery and resiliency

All Bergen County residents need Mental Health First Aid because **mental illness touches everyone.**

## MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

## REQUEST TRAINING FOR 2014-2015



If you are interested in attending a training or having us provide a training course for your organization or would like more information visit [www.bergenhealth.org/mental](http://www.bergenhealth.org/mental) or contact

[mloughlin@co.bergen.nj.us](mailto:mloughlin@co.bergen.nj.us)

or call 201-634-2745





## Stigma-Free Task Force

### **Identify a Stigma-Free ambassador**

- A Stigma-Free ambassador is any resident who embraces the Stigma-Free initiative and will help bring your Stigma-Free campaign to life.
- Your Stigma-Free ambassador involved community member who is connected to the community and understands the specific strengths and weaknesses of your municipality

Your ambassador does not have to be a mental health professional; they can be anyone who is passionate, interested and energetic. Any proactive community member can become a Stigma-Free ambassador: your ambassador could be a local football coach, board of education member, church leader or simply your next door neighbor.

### **Form a Stigma-Free task force**

Gather a team of dedicated residents who can help enhance the culture of caring in your community.

Host a town-hall information meeting to introduce residents to the Stigma-Free Campaign and form a local task force.

- Rally local government and business leaders to support the Stigma-Free cause.
  - Municipal Alliance Leaders
  - Mayor
  - Local business owners
  - Directors for the Board of Education, Board of Health
  - Superintendent of Schools
  - Police Chief
- Encourage local community service groups to embrace the Stigma-Free campaign.
  - Rotary clubs
  - VFW/American Legions
  - Faith communities
  - Lions clubs
  - School service groups
  - Senior Citizen Centers
  - Libraries
- Remember the value that our young people can bring.
  - Work with students to promote Stigma-Free
  - Consider forming a youth task force
  - Reach out to local Boys and Girls Scouts troops





## Stigma-Free Action Plan

***Below are some ideas to bring your local Stigma-Free campaign to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and tasks you think will benefit your municipality in particular.***



Offer *Mental Health First Aid Training* to all municipality employees, residents and community groups.

(For more information on Mental Health First Aid, see page 7)



- Run a town-hall meeting about your local Stigma-Free resolution and campaign efforts.
- Hold a public Stigma-Free forum to discuss your community's Stigma-Free goals and suggestions for campaign events.
- Host a Stigma-Free or NAMI mental health charity walk.
- Set up a Stigma-Free booth at town-wide events and community days.
- Host a Stigma-Free poster contest within local middle schools.
- Have educational events for pre-school and elementary students.
- Develop a website (or extension of your municipality website) with Stigma-Free information and local mental health resources.
- Encourage student Stigma-Free afterschool clubs.
- Collaborate with local community service groups and your local Municipal Alliance Leaders to host a town-wide Stigma-Free celebration.
- Distribute Stigma-Free promotional materials to community members to place on their private lawns and vehicles.
- Host a Stigma-Free/mental illness awareness town concert.

Remember that Stigma-Free is a *community effort*; think about the strengths of your individual municipality and encourage local residents to take initiative in your Stigma-Free Campaign.



## Sample Press Materials

*Sample Press Release:*

### **[TOWN] DECLARES MUNICIPALITY A STIGMA-FREE ZONE**

One in four adults experiences a diagnosable mental illness every year and many of these individuals do not seek help because of fear of shame or judgment from friends, family and co-workers. On [DATE] [TOWN] made the first steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness. The elimination of mental health stigma will allow residents to get the resources they need without judgment.

[TOWN] representatives passed a resolution designating the municipality a Stigma-Free Zone in order to create an environment in which residents will feel free to seek treatment for the disease of mental illness without the fear of being stigmatized. [TOWN] joins the County of Bergen in declaring a Stigma-Free Zone.

[TOWN] hopes to raise awareness of the disease of mental illness, provide an effective way to reduce the stigma associated with the disease and encourage those who are affected to seek services and feel supported. The establishment of this Stigma-Free Zone will raise awareness of local [TOWN] mental health resources so no one resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. The elimination of stigma will enable residents to ask for help when needed so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.

[TOWN] urges anyone who would like more information on the Stigma-Free Campaign to contact \_\_\_\_\_ and to help us to eliminate stigma and promote wellness amongst all [TOWN] and Bergen County residents.

*Sample Public Service Announcement*

**PROUD TO BE  
STIGMA-FREE**

**1 in 4 adults has a diagnosable mental illness**

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**ELIMINATE STIGMA ... RECOVERY BEGINS**