

# ATLANTIC COUNTY PROUD TO BE STIGMA - FREE

## Stigma- Free Campaign – A Toolkit

**Introduction:** A special thank you to Bergen County for sharing their original toolkit that has been adapted by Atlantic County. In 2018, the Atlantic County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution in support of the establishment of Stigma-Free communities throughout the county. This campaign is spreading throughout the state and Atlantic County is in full support of all attempts to reduce stigma associated with mental illness. The campaign has the goals of raising awareness of mental illness and creating a culture where residents feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment without fear of stigma.

**What is Mental Illness?** Mental illness can affect persons of any age, race, religion or income. According to the Mayo Clinic, “mental illness, also called mental health disorders, refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect a person’s ability to function.” It is important to recognize the signs of mental illness and seek treatment for wellness and recovery.

**What is stigma?** According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) “stigma is when someone, or even yourself, views a person in a negative way just because they have a mental health condition. Some people describe stigma as a feeling of shame or judgement from someone else. Navigating life with a mental health condition can be tough, and the isolation, blame and secrecy that is often encouraged by stigma can create huge challenges to reaching out, getting needed support and living well... ” Unfortunately, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common.

Stigma can lead to discrimination. Discrimination may be obvious and direct, such as someone making a negative remark about mental illness or treatment. It may be unintentional or subtle, such as someone avoiding the person because of misconceptions about mental illness.

Some of the harmful effects of stigma can include:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities or trouble finding housing

- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover mental illness treatment
- The false belief the person with mental illness will never succeed at certain challenges or can't improve their situation

In 2004 under former NJ Governor Richard Cody, the state established the Governor's Task Force on Mental Health. One of their recommendations was to establish the Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma. <https://www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil/index.shtml> This website notes: "Stigma hurts everyone living with mental illness, along with their families, friends, colleagues, and the communities in which they live. It is a primary barrier to the achievement of wellness and recovery as well as full social integration, and appears as distrust, fear, stereotyping, and discrimination. The prevalence of mental health stigma seriously undermines an individual's ability to get the help..."

***Who is involved in a stigma free campaign?*** Everyone is involved. This will only work if there is support and involvement by everyone. A successful campaign needs to be at a grassroots level with community-led efforts to promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion. A Stigma-Free campaign should provide information, education and an open discussion about mental illness. It is about changing attitudes, clarifying misinformation and fostering a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgement and can get the help they need to recover.





Across the state, many municipalities have joined the Stigma-Free campaign. By passing a Stigma-Free resolution you will be joining a rapidly growing network of municipalities dedicated to improving the mental health of our community. Church organizations, local clubs, colleges and schools have initiated and participated in local Stigma-Free campaigns.

## Stigma-Free Toolkit

### Joining the Stigma-Free Initiative will:

- Educate our community about mental illness
- 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 mental illness 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

### Suggested Steps to Becoming Stigma-Free:

Adopt a local Stigma Free Campaign resolution (Appendix A- Sample)

Participate in an educational training about mental health (Appendix B – Examples - Mental Health First Aid / QPR)

Form a task force dedicated to propagating Stigma-Free throughout the town (Appendix C)

Place Stigma-Free promotional materials throughout the town, declaring it a Stigma-Free Zone

Stigma-Free action plan (Appendix D - Ideas)

Sample press materials (Appendix E)

Additional Resources (Appendix F)



## APPENDIX A – Sample Stigma-Free Community Resolution

WHEREAS, on April 10, 2018 the Atlantic County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution in support of the establishment of Stigma-Free communities throughout Atlantic County; and

WHEREAS, one in four Americans has experienced mental illness, including substance use, in a given year, according to the National Institute of Mental Health; and

WHEREAS, mental health problems are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults, and including half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran’s Administration hospitals; and

WHEREAS, the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders is identified as a primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from these disorders; and

WHEREAS, Stigma-Free communities aims to inspire community interest and opens dialogue about stigma, raises awareness about mental health and substance use disorders and creates a culture wherein individuals with mental health and substance use disorders feel supported by their communities and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment 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 mental health or substance use disorders so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the (entity/agency) recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the Stigma-Free campaign designating (entity/agency) as a Stigma-Free Zone.

## APPENDIX B – Educational Training



Depending on the interest of your town, school, congregation or organization, any topic related to mental health and wellness can be considered for an educational training. This is “your” stigma-free campaign. Currently, effective mental health awareness trainings are “Mental Health First Aid” and “Question, Persuade, and Refer” (QPR).

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|  | <p>“Mental Health First Aid” – is an eight-hour course that introduces participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance abuse disorders. It reviews risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns, builds understanding of their impact and provides an overview of common treatments.</p>         |
|  | <p>“Question, Persuade, and Refer” (QPR) – is a two hour class that teaches three steps so anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people are trained in CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.</p> |

Currently, the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services are offering free classes on both topics. They have time-limited, SAMHSA grant funding to provide these mental health awareness trainings to groups/ organizations. If interested call 609-438-4325 (HEAL).

The Mental Health Association in Atlantic County also offers training in Mental Health First Aid and can be contacted for further information and trainings. 609-652-3800 [www.mhaac.info](http://www.mhaac.info)

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) is a respected organization on a national, statewide and local level. Our local chapter, Atlantic/Cape May NAMI offers education and support. [www.namiac.org](http://www.namiac.org) (Examples “In Our Own Voice” and “Ending the Silence” for high school students).

## APPENDIX C – 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, gather local interest and form a local task force.
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- 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

## APPENDIX D – Stigma-Free Action Plan

Some ideas:

- 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 / community events.
- Host a Stigma-Free or NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) mental health 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 health awareness town concert.
- Dedicate a sporting event to promote the Stigma-Free message.
- Collaborate with NAMI and other mental health awareness groups to provide community education and awareness events.
- Promote personal stories of wellness and recovery

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

## APPENDIX E – Sample Press Release

*Sample Press Release:*

### **[TOWN/AGENCY/SCHOOL] DECLARES 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 coworkers. On [DATE] [TOWN/AGENCY/SCHOOL] 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/AGENCY/SCHOOL] representatives passed a resolution designating the (ENTITY) 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/AGENCY/SCHOOL] joins the County of Atlantic in declaring a Stigma-Free Zone.

[TOWN/AGENCY/SCHOOL] hopes to raise awareness 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, students, employees to ask for help when needed so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.

[TOWN/AGENCY/SCHOOL] 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/AGENCY/SCHOOL] and Atlantic County residents.





## APPENDIX F - RESOURCES

**The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation and to improve the lives of individuals living with mental and substance use disorders, and their families. SAMHSA provides leadership and resources – programs, policies, information and data, funding, and personnel – advance mental and substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery services in order to improve individual, community, and public health. [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**The National Alliance on Mental Illness** (NAMI), on their national website, has a [Pledge to Be StigmaFree | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) as well as a Stigma Free Quiz. [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) Our local Atlantic Cape May NAMI [www.namiac.org](http://www.namiac.org) offers education, resources and support. 609-741-5125

**New Jersey Division of Mental Health And Addiction Services** (NJ DMHAS) [Department of Human Services | Hotlines/Helplines/Treatment Directories \(state.nj.us\)](#) The Division oversees the provision of a broad range of community mental health and addiction services throughout the State, and contracts with various entities to provide and support community-based prevention, early intervention, treatment, education and recovery services, including for at-risk and special populations. 1-800-382-6717 Their website lists hotlines as well as statewide treatment/resource directories.

New Jersey [Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma \(nj.gov\)](#) [www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil/index.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil/index.shtml) The mission of the Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma is to combat mental health stigma in New Jersey's effort to create a better mental health system. Through outreach and education, the Council will send a message that mental health stigma must no longer be tolerated. The website offers helpful information and resources.

**Mental Health Association in NJ** – [www.mhanj.org](http://www.mhanj.org) The Mental Health Association in New Jersey is a statewide non-profit organization that strives for children and adults to achieve victory over mental health and substance use disorders through advocacy, education, training, and services. Our local Mental Health Association in Atlantic County [www.mhaac.info](http://www.mhaac.info) has information, resources, services and supports. 609-652-3800

**Atlantic County Mental Health Resource Directory for Adults and their Families-** This is a tri-fold brochure that lists some of the many local resources available in Atlantic County. Download a copy from: <https://www.atlantic-county.org/mental-health/>

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| <p>If you have any questions about this toolkit or the Stigma-Free campaign, please contact<br/>Kathy Quish, LCSW - Atlantic County Mental Health Administrator<br/>609-645-7700 ext. 4519</p> |
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