STOP STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Stigma is the rejection, avoidance or fear people direct toward those they perceive as being “different.”

Stigma and shame often prevent people living with mental illness from seeking treatment. Stigma becomes discrimination when it deprives people of their civil rights, access to fair housing, employment opportunities, education and full participation in life. When fear of discrimination or stigma is removed, people living with mental illness may feel more comfortable seeking treatment, and thus able to recover and engage more fully in life.

The Mental Illness: It’s not always what you think project was initiated by Sacramento County Division of Behavioral Health Services to:

• Reduce stigma and discrimination
• Promote mental health and wellness
• Inspire hope for people and families living with mental illness

To learn more about the Mental Illness: It’s not always what you think project or to share your thoughts on mental illness, visit us at:

StopStigmaSacramento.org
Call 2-1-1 (or TTY 916-446-1434)
Calls are always confidential. Interpreters are available.

Mental Illness: It’s not always what you think.

In a 1999 report, the United States Surgeon General identified stigma as “the most formidable obstacle to future progress in the arena of mental illness and health.”

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999

Mental Illness does not discriminate.

But sometimes people do.
Mental illness affects every ethnic, racial, economic, religious and age group. Roughly one in every four adults will experience a diagnosable mental illness during their lifetime. Nearly one out of every five children will experience emotional or behavioral difficulty. In Sacramento County, it is estimated that nearly 355,000 residents are living with a mental illness.

**FACT:** Like heart disease or diabetes, research shows that mental illness is often a medical condition that calls for proper treatment, support and education.

**FACT:** Two-thirds of people with a diagnosable mental illness never seek professional help. Many do not know where to go, don’t realize their condition is treatable or fear discrimination.

**FACT:** Self-stigma prevents up to 60% of those with mental illness from seeking treatment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who suffer from chronic, untreated depression may die up to 25 years earlier than someone in the general population.

**FACT:** Roughly 50% of those with severe mental illness are also affected by substance abuse. Living with both disorders significantly increases the stigma and discrimination often resulting in social isolation.

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**8 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO STOP STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION**

1. **MAKE A PLEDGE.** Refuse to perpetuate or tolerate stigma and commit to changing your language and attitude about people living with mental illness. Using words like “crazy” or “insane” to describe someone living with mental illness is hurtful. Commit to removing this type of language and other labels from your life.

2. **TAKE A STAND.** Ask others to stop promoting stigma and using hurtful language. Keep in mind the best way to stop others from promoting stigma is to educate them about mental health and to let them know how their words and actions hurt others.

3. **EDUCATE YOURSELF.** Learn about mental health issues and the devastating effects of stigma. Ask someone who has openly shared about their mental health issues what their experience is like. Knowledge is a powerful tool for dispelling myths and stereotypes. Share your knowledge.

4. **BE AN ALLY.** Think of a friend or family member you have been concerned about. Call them to see how they are feeling. If someone you know exhibits sudden changes in behavior or is experiencing suicidal thoughts, reach out to them and make every effort to ensure that they get help.

5. **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it illegal to discriminate against people with physical or psychiatric disabilities in employment, transportation, communication, or recreation. The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status, or disability.

6. **BE FEARLESS.** Begin a discussion with friends or family about a mental health topic, even if it doesn’t apply to you. “What causes someone to feel suicidal?” or “What do you think children feel when their parents divorce?” are examples.

7. **END THE SILENCE.** If you have been feeling down, stressed, or anxious, call or meet with a trusted friend or family member and tell them how you are feeling. Remember that when you speak about your experience with mental illness, you give others permission to share their experiences.

8. **USE YOUR VOICE.** Join a speakers bureau or support group. Being open about mental illness can reduce stigma and raise awareness.

For additional information and resources, go to: [StopStigmaSacramento.org](http://StopStigmaSacramento.org)

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