



STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN MUNICIPALITY TOOLKIT

The Gloucester County Stigma-Free Campaign is a county-wide program which aims to eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use disorders.



Gloucester County Board of Commissioners

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For further information, stigma free materials, and to share your stigma free campaign initiative please email: stigmafree@co.goucester.nj.us

Adapted from:

[Stigma-Free Toolkit – Morris County, NJ \(morriscountynj.gov\)](#)

Mental Illness and Stigma

What is a mental illness?

Mental illnesses refer to disorders generally characterized by dysregulation of mood, thought, 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 labeled 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.



Introductions

The Gloucester County Stigma-Free Campaign is a county-wide program, which aims to eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use disorders. We are dedicated to raising awareness of these illnesses by creating an environment where affected individuals are supported in their efforts to achieve wellness and recovery.

Prevalence of Mental Illness

The World Health Organization ranks mental health conditions, including alcohol and substance use disorders, as the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds. One 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.

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 foster a stigma-free environment where residents feel supported in receiving treatment or education for all health concerns.

For more information on the disease of mental illness, visit www.samhsa.gov

The Gloucester County Stigma-Free Campaign



Establishing stigma-free communities will raise awareness of the local mental health and recovery resources available so that no resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. Stigma-free communities will encourage residents to break down barriers, be mindful of their mental health, and ask for help when needed. Substance use disorders and mental illness have 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.

This county-wide campaign includes all Gloucester County residents, young and old. From bus drivers to school administrators, business owners to law enforcement, every community member is a key stakeholder. We want to link all stakeholders to training opportunities and awareness events aimed at increasing public knowledge about mental illness and substance use disorders and knowledge of local resources available to Gloucester County residents.

The following pages include a Stigma-Free toolkit for Gloucester 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 behavioral health of our Gloucester County community.

SAMPLE Stigma Free Communities Resolution

WHEREAS, the Gloucester County Board of Commissioners, along with the Gloucester County Division of Human and Special Services, supports the designation of Stigma-Free communities in every municipality, and;

WHEREAS, at their March 19, 2019 meeting the Gloucester County Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution supporting the designation of Gloucester County as a Stigma-Free community, and;

WHEREAS, Gloucester County recognizes that one in four Americans has experienced mental illness, including substance use disorders, 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, including more than half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran's Administration hospitals, and;

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help and their families and community. 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 communities 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 experience 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 communities 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 Gloucester County Stigma Free Campaign in designating [TOWN] as a Stigma-Free Community.

Stigma-Free Action Plan

Below are some ideas to bring your local Stigma-Free Community to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and plans and add your own that you think will benefit your local municipality.

If you are already hosting similar events, you may include them to The Gloucester County Stigma-Free Campaign by simply rebranding the event as “[Event name]: A Stigma-Free Event” and including the welcome message (detailed on the following page) or simply add an activity that educates or increases awareness.

- Run a town-hall meeting about your local Stigma-Free resolution and efforts.
- Hold a Stigma-Free focus group to discuss your community’s Stigma-Free goals and gather input for community events.
- Promote Mental Health First Aid Training for municipal employees, residents and community groups.
- Host a Stigma-Free or Recovery Walk.
- Set up a Stigma-Free booth at town-wide events and community days. Email stigmafree@co.goucester.nj.us for copies of the county-wide resource guide.
- Host a Stigma-Free poster contest within local middle or high schools.
- Have educational events for pre-school and elementary students.
- Add a link to the Gloucester County Stigma-Free webpage on your municipal website.
- 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/Recovery Awareness town concert.
- Collaborate with recovery groups to promote their efforts and promote recovery activities and recreational events.

Example Stigma-Free Welcome Message:

“Hello, and welcome to the [insert event name]. In line with our new Stigma-Free Campaign, this event will be a Stigma-Free event. Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from judgment by others. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As part of a county-wide campaign, [insert name here] is acting 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 mental illness and substance use disorders. We’d like to open this event by reminding you that everyone has the power to break through stigma. We encourage you to support one another, seek the services you need, and do not judge. Together we can decrease stigma to create a culture of caring in our congregation and to be carried out into the community. Please contact [insert contact person’s name and phone number] for more information.”

Mental Health First Aid

What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews appropriate supports. This 8-hour course uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to offer initial help in a mental health crisis and connect people to the appropriate professional, peer, social and self-help care. The program also teaches common risk factors and warning signs of specific illnesses like anxiety, depression, substance use, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia.

What do you learn?

Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis. In the Mental Health First Aid course, you learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help.



You could be the help that someone needs. Get trained today!

Upcoming courses will be posted on www.goucestercountynj.gov

For more information, email: stigmafree@co.goucester.nj.us

QPR Training

Question. Persuade. Refer.

QPR Mission:

The QPR mission is to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. The signs of crisis are all around us. We believe that quality education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know.

As a QPR-trained Gatekeeper you will learn to:

- Recognize the warning signs of suicide
- Know how to offer hope
- Know how to get help and save a life

Who is a Gatekeeper?

According to the Surgeon General's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (2001), a gatekeeper is someone in a position to recognize a crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide.

Gatekeepers can be anyone, but include parents, friends, neighbors, teachers, school staff, ministers, doctors, nurses, office supervisors, squad leaders, foremen, police officers, advisors, caseworkers, firefighters, and many others who are strategically positioned to recognize and refer someone at risk of suicide.

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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 coworkers. On [DATE] [TOWN] made the first steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use disorder. 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 mental illness or substance use disorder without the fear of being judged. [TOWN] joins The Gloucester County Board of Commissioners in declaring a Stigma-Free Zone.

[TOWN] hopes to raise awareness about mental illness and substance use disorder, provide an effective way to reduce the stigma associated these health concerns and encourage those who are affected to seek services and feel supported. The establishment of this Stigma-Free Zone will raise awareness of local 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 Gloucester County Stigma-Free Campaign to contact (INSERT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER). Help us to promote wellness amongst all [TOWN] residents.