

# Mental Health Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Just like physical health, we all have mental health, and it is as equally important at every stage of life for our overall well-being. Our mental health influences how we think, feel and relate to others. Millions of people—one in five US adults--are affected by mental illness each year across the country. Understanding that people are not in their situation alone, and that mental illness is common, helps to reduce the stigma of mental health problems.

A mental illness is usually not caused by a single event. There can be many factors that contribute to the risk of mental illness, such as early adverse life experiences (e.g., trauma or history of abuse), chronic medical conditions (e.g., cancer or diabetes), biological/genetic factors, chemical imbalances in the brain, alcohol or drug use, and being socially isolated. The best way to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month and overcome the stigma is to talk openly about mental health. If you or someone you know needs help, see pages 7 and 8 for resources, including how to connect with behavioral health care and mental health services.



## Participate in the following activities to learn more:

<b>Activity 1</b>	Understanding your Mental Health Webinar/Mental Health Continuum
<b>Activity 2</b>	EAP Scavenger Hunt
<b>Activity 3</b>	Mood Tracker
<b>Activity 4</b>	Mental Health Bingo
<b>Resources</b>	Seeking Out Support

**1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year**

**50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24**  
(Source: [NAMI](#))

For questions, email [wellness@wellfirstbenefits.com](mailto:wellness@wellfirstbenefits.com)

# Health Disparities

“Health disparities” are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups. Health disparities are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, the ability to access healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all incredibly important to your overall health.

Those who face health disparities also often have poorer mental health outcomes. Even though most racial and ethnic groups overall have similar or, in some instances, fewer mental health disorders than whites, the consequences of mental illness in minorities may be long-lasting. Also, people from some racial/ethnic groups are less likely to receive mental health care services. (Source: [Psychiatry.org](https://www.psychiatry.org))

## Did You Know?

- Hispanic, Black and African American people living below the poverty line are twice as likely to report serious psychological distress than those living over 2x the poverty level. (Source: [OHM](https://www.ohm.org))
- Black and African American adults are more likely to have feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness than white adults. (Source: [MHA](https://www.mha.org))
- Blacks and African Americans are less likely than white people to die from suicide at all ages. However, Black and African American teenagers are more likely to attempt suicide than white teenagers (9.8% vs. 6.1%). (Source: [MHA](https://www.mha.org))
- One out of three African Americans who need mental health care receive it. When they do seek care, they often receive poorer quality of care and experience a lack of access to culturally competent care. (Source: [DBSA](https://www.dbsa.org))
- Even though rates of depression are lower in Blacks (24.6%) and Hispanics (19.6%) than in whites (37.4%), depression in Blacks and Hispanics is likely to be more persistent. (Source: [DBSA](https://www.dbsa.org))
- About 2.7 million people who identify as Asian American/Pacific Islander have a mental and/or substance abuse disorder and are less likely to seek mental health services than any other racial/ethnic group. (Source: [DBSA](https://www.dbsa.org))

For more information, please visit:

- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](https://www.dbsa.org)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov)
- [Mental Health America](https://www.mha.org)

# Activity 1: Understanding Your Mental Health

## Part 1: Watch the Webinar

Join us for the **Understanding Your Mental Health** webinar on **May 17 at noon** while we reframe misconceptions of mental health and introduce the concept of the Mental Health Continuum. Whether you are thriving, surviving, struggling, or in crisis, join us to learn more about the spectrum of resources and support we have to assist you in managing your mental health and overall well-being. If you miss the webinar, visit the [video library](#) and look for the *Emotional* dimension.

[Register here](#)

## Part 2: Mental Health Continuum Activity

After watching the webinar, check in with your mental well-being. Review the different phases of the continuum and identify where you currently are. Then determine strategies to help you in each phase of the continuum. Keep in mind that it's common to move between phases, so having a plan for each is helpful.

### Mental Health Continuum

SYMPTOMS			
 <b>THRIVING</b>	 <b>SURVIVING</b>	 <b>STRUGGLING</b>	 <b>IN CRISIS</b>
<p><b>"I got this!"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal mood fluctuations</li> <li>• Normal sleep patterns</li> <li>• Physically and socially active</li> <li>• Good energy level</li> <li>• Limited or no alcohol use/gambling</li> </ul>	<p><b>"If I could only..."</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritable, nervous or sad</li> <li>• Trouble sleeping</li> <li>• Decreased social activity</li> <li>• Low energy, muscle tension, headaches</li> <li>• Regular but controlled alcohol use/gambling</li> </ul>	<p><b>"When is this going to end?"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger, anxiety, pervasive sadness, hopelessness</li> <li>• Restless or disturbed sleep</li> <li>• Social avoidance</li> <li>• Fatigue, aches and pains</li> <li>• Alcohol use/gambling hard to control</li> </ul>	<p><b>"I can't take it anymore!"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive anxiety, easily enraged, depressed mood</li> <li>• Unable to fall or stay asleep</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Exhaustion, physical illness</li> <li>• Alcohol/gambling abuse or addiction</li> </ul>
ACTIONS AND RESOURCES			
<p><b>Self-care and Social Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain healthy lifestyle</li> <li>• Identify and nurture support systems</li> </ul>		<p><b>Professional Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek social support instead of withdrawing</li> <li>• Seek help</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize stressors and use healthy coping strategies</li> <li>• Consider seeking help</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek help now!</li> <li>• Follow health care provider recommendations</li> </ul>	

1. What phase resonates most with how you're feeling now? What percent of the time do you feel this way? (e.g., I feel like I'm struggling 50% of the time.)

2. Write down strategies that will help you when you are in each phase of the continuum.

<b>THRIVING</b>	<p><b>Strategies to stay in this zone</b> (e.g., continuing the healthy activities you enjoy):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>SURVIVING</b>	<p><b>Strategies to get back to thriving</b> (e.g., healthy eating, sleep habits, &amp; activities):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>STRUGGLING</b>	<p><b>Consider seeking outside help</b> (e.g., social support—calling a friend, getting advice from a co-worker, or asking a partner for help with tasks/chores):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3. Consider seeking outside professional help.</li> </ol>
<b>CRISIS</b>	<p><b>Text or call 988. Seek help.</b></p> <p>Consider using the <a href="#">Resources</a> and <a href="#">Seeking Out Mental Health Support</a> pages.</p>

# Activity 2: EAP Scavenger Hunt

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides a wide range of services and resources for employees and is offered by many employers. Employees may use the EAP services for personal or work-related issues, such as short-term counseling, legal advice, and financial planning. Complete the EAP scavenger hunt to learn more.

- Does your employer offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?
  - Yes: Find out how to access it. It may require an access code from your employer.
  - No: Ask if they have something comparable and check out the *Resources* in this toolkit.
- In what ways are you able to access your EAP? (e.g., computer, mobile app, phone, text)  
Phone/text: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Website: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile App: \_\_\_\_\_
- List three things that your EAP offers. Consider which one(s) you are most likely to use.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

# Activity 3: Mood Tracker

Tracking your mood patterns can be helpful and good for your mental health because the way you feel, think, and act are all interconnected in a feedback loop. How we feel impacts how we think, how we think affects how we act, and how we act influences our feelings.

Tracking your mood throughout the day, week or month may help you identify patterns, allowing you to take proactive measures to attempt to alter the outcome. For example, if you notice that you tend to feel angry on Saturday mornings, you can explore why that might be. Is there a list of chores to be done over the weekend that you don't want to do? Are your weekends too busy? Not busy enough? Start to experiment with some variables to see if your mood pattern changes.

Use a daily mood tracker, journal, or app (e.g., Daylio) or create your own to keep track of your mood. Include notes to explain your mood (e.g., an activity you were doing, etc.).

- Determine how long you are going to track your mood.  
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- After the time has expired, review your tracker and identify your mood pattern(s). Explore possible reasons for the pattern(s).  
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\_\_\_\_\_

## MOOD TRACKER

	Happy Content Relaxed	Sad Lonely Depressed	Productive Motivated Excited	Sick Tired Bored	Normal Fine OK	Angry Anxious Frustrated
S	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
T	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
W	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Th	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
F	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
S	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- If you identified a mood you wish to change, experiment with some variables (e.g., time, location, activity) to see if the mood pattern changes. If not, test another variable.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Activity 4: Mental Health Bingo

There are many things that can positively impact your mental health, like moving your body more, taking a mindful walk in nature, or eating a nutritious meal. All these things can help maintain or boost your mental health.

During the month, complete as many activities as you can to make a bingo on the card below. Or get a blackout by completing all 25 activities! If you are already doing the activity, you can cross it off. You can cross off more than one square each day.

B	I	N	G	O
Plan healthy snacks or meals for the week	Read or log your mood/emotions in a journal	Celebrate an accomplishment	Breathe in and out deeply for two minutes	Call or video chat with someone you haven't talked to in a while
Spend time on a meaningful hobby	Show compassion with yourself when you slip up (e.g., positive self-talk)	Thank someone or write a gratitude letter	Hug a friend or pet	Spend time outdoors
Take 30 minutes away from technology	Spend quality time with friends or family	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	Write down three things you are grateful for	Work on a goal or complete an item from your to-do list
Get a good night's sleep	Do some form of exercise	Listen to a favorite song/playlist or uplifting music	Identify what is inside and outside of your control	Try yoga, meditation, or stretching
Take a mindful pause during a busy moment or take a break during a busy day	Do something kind for someone else	Avoid alcohol or drug use	Laugh or make someone else laugh	Drink at least eight glasses of water a day

# Resources

Resources are available to anyone, regardless of insurance, unless otherwise noted\*.

## Wellness Programs

The Health Plan offers a wide variety of [wellness programs](#) (e.g., webinars, educational resources and upcoming events) that are open to everyone, regardless of insurance.

## Behavioral Health Care

Primary care providers are trained to be able to help most people with mood problems like anxiety or depression. If additional care is needed, you can ask your provider for a referral to a behavioral health specialist.

- Make an appointment with your primary care provider.
- Ask for a referral to a behavioral health specialist on MyChart (or your patient portal) or by calling the clinic.
- Go to [wellfirstbenefits.com/find-a-doctor](https://www.wellfirstbenefits.com/find-a-doctor)\* and enter 'behavioral health services' for the specialty.
- Call the Customer Care Center listed on your member card\* and ask about in-network behavioral health specialists (or contact your insurance company if you're not a WellFirst Health Plan member).

## Case Management for Behavioral Health and Substance Use\*

For members with mental health and substance use disorders, [WellFirst Health Plan's behavioral health and substance use case management](#)\* provides an individualized approach. The goal is to help you manage your health and live your best life.

## Mental Health Services through SSM Health\*

It's not easy coping with a mental health issue. As with any other medical condition, treating emotional and behavioral conditions such as anxiety, depression, or addiction is what our professionals are here to do. [Our team](#)\* of counselors, psychiatrists, nurses, and specialized therapists work to provide support, expertise, and individualized care to patients of all ages and their families.

## Mental Health Professionals Guide

**Counselor/Therapist/Social Worker:** Trained to help manage or recover from conditions like stress, anxiety, depression, grief, or thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) can diagnose.

**Psychologist:** Similar to counselors, therapists, and social workers, can diagnose and improve functioning. More emphasis is on assessment, research and the medical model of care.

**Psychiatrist:** Able to diagnose and prescribe medication to support mental health.

**AODA Counselor:** Provides therapy and treatment regarding alcohol/drug abuse and dependency.

## Community Resources

[Nami.org](https://www.nami.org)

[National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988](https://www.nationalsuicideline.org)

[Alcoholics Anonymous](https://www.alcoholicsanonymous.org)

[Mental Health America](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

[Supporting Parents Under Stress](https://www.supportingparents.org)

[Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health](https://www.wisconsin.gov/childrens-mental-health)

[CDC: How Right Now](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth)

# Seeking Out Mental Health Support

If you have identified the need to seek professional help to support your overall mental health, you are not alone. According to the CDC, in 2021, 70 million Americans sought professional mental health support. Much like physical health, there are many tactics you may use to support your mental health. Additionally, there are times when professional help is needed to support physical or mental health.

***If you are in crisis, thinking about suicide, or are concerned about someone who might be, call or text 988 to talk with someone at the National Suicide Hotline. You can also call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.***

## Four Steps to Accessing Professional Mental Health Support

### Step 1: Ask yourself the following questions

*If you answer yes to any of these, continue to step 2.*

- Would it help to have a professional guide me through a change, loss, or challenging time?
- Are there things I want to say that need to be kept confidential?
- Am I out of ideas and need to add some different tools to my toolbelt?

### Step 2: Find a professional and make an appointment

- Talk to your primary care provider, who will provide support or refer you to a mental health provider.
- Research network providers:
  - Visit [wellfirstbenefits.com/find-a-doctor](https://wellfirstbenefits.com/find-a-doctor)\* (search *behavioral health*).
  - Call the Customer Care number\* on the back of your insurance card and ask for assistance locating mental health providers.
- Your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may offer free short-term counseling. If your employer offers an EAP, the information is likely included with other benefit information, or you can ask your HR department or supervisor.

### Step 3: Prepare/Your Appointment

- Consider what you want to get out of your time with the provider, and think about what goals you have.
- Be prepared for an initial assessment. The therapist may have some standardized questions to better understand your history and needs.
- Create a list of questions you might have, and feel free to take notes during the appointment.
- Remember that these appointments are confidential\*\*, and being open and honest with the provider will best help support your needs.

### Step 4: After the Appointment

- Your provider will likely provide suggestions for future appointment frequency. It may be best to schedule some of the follow-ups at the appointment if that is possible.
- Your provider may provide handouts or suggestions. Determine a plan to follow up on your agreed-upon tactics between appointments. How can you prioritize your plan to keep your health front and center?
- If able, engage family and friends with your plan.
- Remember, any change is hard and takes active work. Try not to be discouraged if it is a slower process than what you were expecting.

*\*Health Plan members only*

*\*\*Providers have a duty to report information during sessions if they believe there is a risk to a person (i.e., a patient reports a plan to harm someone).*