

Raising Awareness of Behavioral Health & Community Treatment Resources: Mental Health First Aid Act (S. 711/H.R. 1877)

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that helps parents, first responders, faith leaders, and other people identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use conditions. Participants learn a 5-step action plan to reach out to a person in crisis and connect them professional, peer, or other help.

The bipartisan Mental Health First Aid Act (S. 711/H.R. 1877) authorizes \$20 million in grants to fund Mental Health First Aid training programs around the country. Participants would be trained in:

- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of common mental illnesses and substance use disorders
- De-escalating crisis situations safely
- Initiating timely referral to mental health and substance use treatment resources available in the community

Why do we need the Mental Health First Aid Act?

Each year, more than one in five Americans experiences a mental illness or substance use disorder. Yet, as a society, we remain largely ignorant about the signs and symptoms, and don't know how to help a person in need.

Our lack of awareness often prevents people who need treatment from getting appropriate care. While many Americans know how to administer First Aid and seek medical help should they come across a person having a heart attack, few are trained to provide similar help to someone experiencing a mental health or substance-use related crisis.

Mental Health First Aid has been shown to increase help-seeking and improve adherence to treatment. Studies have shown that Mental Health First Aid increases help provided to others, increases guidance to professional help, and improves concordance with health professionals about treatment.

We can all benefit. This bipartisan bill would offer training programs to emergency services personnel, police officers, teachers/school administrators, primary care professionals, and others – with the goal of improving Americans' mental health and helping people who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm.

How is this bill different from the \$15 million appropriation for MHFA in 2015?

The fiscal year 2015 budget included a \$15 million appropriation for Mental Health First Aid. The National Council is grateful to Congress for this support. The Mental Health First Aid Act will help solidify the future of this funding by providing statutory authorization clearly delineating Congressional intent regarding the scope of the program.

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