

# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

## *Four Ways Forward*

Toolkit



NATIONAL COUNCIL  
*for* Mental Wellbeing

2024



## A MESSAGE FROM CHUCK INGOGLIA, PRESIDENT & CEO

### *Let's Make Mental Wellbeing a Priority*

We've made meaningful progress to improve awareness. As a result, more people understand the value of caring for their mental wellbeing and are more comfortable discussing mental health and substance use challenges. But we still have a long way to go. And this month marks an important time for advancing that progress.

The information in this toolkit will help answer questions about what you can do on a personal level to promote mental health awareness in your community.

It offers useful information and tips you can use and share with friends and family. It will also help us raise our voice and our collective presence as we promote mental health awareness and the need to fight stigma and eliminate barriers to access.

So, let's work together not only during Mental Health Awareness Month, but year-round, to support one another and those who will benefit from our important work to make mental wellbeing — including recovery from substance use — a reality for everyone.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck Ingoglia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Chuck Ingoglia**

President and CEO

[National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)

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# GETTING STARTED: FOUR WAYS FORWARD

“Four Ways Forward” is an invitation for you to take action this [Mental Health Awareness Month](#) in four unique ways across the span of four weeks. By raising your voice, prioritizing your self-care, celebrating mental wellbeing and being the difference, you can advance awareness in your community while positively impacting your own mental health. Let’s get started!

## ***Week 1: Raise Your Voice and Advocate for Change***

In the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) [2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), nearly 50 million people aged 12 or older in the U.S. indicated having a substance use disorder, and nearly 60 million adults aged 18 or older had any mental illness (defined as a mental, behavioral or emotional disorder). Adolescents are also facing significant challenges, as 3.4 million people aged 12-17 had serious thoughts of suicide and 1 in 5 had a major depressive episode.

Not enough people are getting the care they need. According to the survey, in the year prior, only 1 in 4 people had received the substance use disorder treatment they needed, only half of the adults received the necessary mental health treatment and more than 40% of youth aged 12-17 indicated not receiving the mental health treatment they needed.

By advocating for [public policy that expands access to comprehensive care and treatment](#), we can work to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to the care they need, when and where they need it. Your voices, stories and experiences help policymakers understand why we need action now to improve access to care and treatment. Here are four things you can do to help advocate and stay informed:

- 1.** [Sign up for our Advocacy Alerts](#) to be notified when there are opportunities to contact your elected officials and urge them to support key bills, and [stay up to date](#) on breaking federal mental health and substance use policy news by joining our weekly Capitol Connector newsletter distribution list.
- 2.** Lend your voice, share your story and show your support of our [advocacy priorities](#) and policies that remove barriers to accessing care and treatment.
- 3.** Learn about innovative [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics \(CCBHCs\) and how they’re helping improve access to mental health and substance use care](#) and efforts to further support and grow the number of CCBHCs nationwide.
- 4.** [Download our Advocacy Handbook](#) to access tips, tricks and templates for becoming a mental health and substance use treatment advocate in your community.

## Week 2: Lead by Example — Prioritize Your Self-care

Practicing self-care is not only beneficial for you — it sets an important example for others. Your self-care practices demonstrate the importance of looking after one’s mental wellbeing. Prioritize your own mental health by implementing self-care routines and healthy coping mechanisms. Here are four ideas:

1. Refer to the [National Council’s activity calendar](#) with daily suggestions and opportunities for practicing self-care this month.
2. [Take a mental health day from work this month](#). Plan time away from the stress of your workload to nurture your mental wellbeing.
3. Use relaxation exercises like meditation and [deep breathing](#) to help you unwind, stay present and centered.
4. Try to do at least one relaxing activity each day, like a short walk, listening to music, reading or journaling for 30 minutes. This is beneficial not only as a regular routine but in times you may be feeling [especially overwhelmed](#).

## Week 3: Celebrate Mental Wellbeing

By communicating how important mental wellbeing is to you, you can help us raise awareness about mental health and inspire change! This month, and year-round, wear your badge of honor for mental health advocacy, showcase your Mental Health First Aid certification, participate in a National Council partner activity and more. Here are a few ways to get started:

1. [Download](#) our suite of graphics and post them to your social media channels to bring attention to mental wellbeing.
2. Support mental wellbeing across the country by [taking part](#) in MTV’s Mental Health Awareness Month campaign on May 16.
3. Celebrate this month’s significance with the [Mental Health Coalition](#), a national community of organizations that’s creating positive change.
4. Reshare our social media activity throughout the month, and reach out to check in with your family, friends and networks. Look for opportunities to showcase your mental wellbeing pride.

## Week 4: Be the Difference — Get Involved

Supporting Mental Health Awareness Month also means supporting friends, family and community members who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. By knowing how to offer assistance in their time of need, you can be the difference in someone's recovery journey.

We believe every 1 in 15 people nationwide should have the ability to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges. You can join us in that mission by:

1. Getting trained in [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)](#) today. Being a First Aider is more than a certification — it's a commitment to understanding, supporting and championing mental health. [Find a course near you.](#)
2. Becoming one of the thousands of [MHFA Instructors](#) who have trained more than 3 million First Aiders across the country! Instructors are essential to bringing MHFA to communities; learn how you can lead the mental health movement in yours.
3. Attending our [webinars](#) — and encouraging others to join you — to learn about the topics and trends shaping mental health and substance use treatment and care. Take advantage of 50+ webinars a year!
4. Staying in the know and sharing your knowledge on all-things mental health by [reading our blog](#) and [signing up for our newsletters](#). You'll find insights from experts, self-care tips, helpful resources and more!



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

To show your support for Mental Health Awareness Month, we encourage you to share these articles with your loved ones, family, friends and colleagues.

### [How and Why to Practice Self-care](#)

With mental health challenges on the rise — [rates of depression alone tripled](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic — it's possible that you may find yourself or someone you know in need of support. To be equipped to offer that support, you need to take care of yourself.

Practicing self-care can better equip you to deal with a crisis and the difficulty of aiding someone with a mental health or substance use challenge. Engaging in a self-care routine has been [clinically proven](#) to reduce or eliminate anxiety and depression, reduce stress, increase happiness and more. It can also help you adapt to changes, build strong relationships and recover from setbacks.

In a national survey, individuals cited benefits of self-care as: enhanced self-confidence (64%), increased productivity (67%) and happiness (71%). From a physical health perspective, self-care also reduces heart disease, stroke and cancer.

#### Self-care goals can include:



**Taking care of your physical and psychological health.**



**Managing and reducing stress.**



**Recognizing your emotional and spiritual needs.**



**Fostering and sustaining relationships.**



**Achieving balance in different areas of your life.**

The self-care activities you choose to participate in should help you achieve balance in different areas of your life to promote your overall wellness. SAMHSA has [defined](#) eight dimensions of wellness to help you focus on optimizing your health: emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, occupational and social.

When thinking of different self-care activities to try, think about these dimensions in your life and how you can improve them. Self-care should not be something you force yourself to do. Self-care practices will refuel you, helping you to take care of yourself and support those around you. If you're having trouble thinking of ways you can take better care of yourself, here are four simple ways you can get started.

- 1. Move more.** Physical activity can help the brain cope better with stress, making it beneficial in the treatment of depression and anxiety symptoms, in addition to it strengthening the immune system. You can also turn your exercise routine into a way to spend more time outdoors. Walks, hikes or runs may be easier to fit into your schedule. Studies have shown that [spending time outdoors](#) can help reduce fatigue, making it a great way to manage symptoms of depression or burnout.
- 2. Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** What we eat and drink can affect our [body's ability](#) to prevent, fight and recover from infections, and it can impact our mood. If you're feeling anxious or unwell, incorporating certain foods into your diet can help alleviate anxiety or encourage the release of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine. Try to incorporate as many fruits, vegetables and whole grains into your meals as you can. Other healthy choices include fatty fish, leafy greens and nuts. If you find yourself stopping for takeout too often or eating too many processed foods, try cooking. It's a great way to relax and ensure that your body gets the nutrients it needs.
- 3. Prioritize sleep.** Sleep has a significant impact on how you feel mentally and physically. [Getting enough sleep](#) will help regulate your mood, improve brain function and increase your energy to help tackle the day. Take action to ensure that you rest your body by going to bed around the same time each night. Adults usually require seven to eight hours of sleep per night. If you have trouble falling asleep, try some relaxation exercises or meditation. You can also take a break from social media or disconnect from your phone. Limiting your caffeine and sugar consumption may also help improve your sleep. If you work from home, try and keep your work area and sleep area separate from each other.
- 4. Plan self-care and set boundaries.** Take a moment to think about the best methods to move forward in your life and stay grounded. It's critical to schedule regular self-care time — plan time to do something that gives you joy and helps you recharge. If you're feeling anxious, [setting boundaries](#) can help you feel safe and comfortable in your surroundings. Boundaries can include setting expectations around physical safety measures with family and friends or putting limits on certain activities. Another method? Create a “no list” of things you know you don't like or that you no longer want to do. Examples might include not checking emails at night or answering your phone during meals. Learning to say no to things that cause unnecessary stress will positively impact your mental wellbeing.

Think about the advice we get on airplanes: Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting someone else. Without caring for yourself, you won't be able to help them. Similarly, if you're not taking care of your body and mind, you won't be the best version of yourself, especially when others need you. With a self-care routine that brings you joy, you'll reap the benefits of a healthier mind and body. And that includes being there for the people who need you.

### 3 Steps to Creating Healthy Boundaries

One more email. One more text. One more date on the calendar. It's shocking how "one more" can quickly become 20 more things to do. Soon, it seems you can't get ahead or catch your breath. While work and personal life will inevitably throw some stressful situations your way, adding healthy boundaries into your daily routine will help your mental wellbeing and allow you to navigate challenging times when they do rise.

Overbooking and overpromising is a hard habit to break, but it can have real implications to your health, especially if you have anxiety and/or a stress-related disorder. The [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) curricula](#) says while everyday anxiety and stressors can keep people from harmful situations, anxiety and stressor-related disorders differ in that they are typically more persistent, severe and interfere with your life.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that anxiety disorders tend to be [more common](#) in women than in men, affecting 54% of women and 46% of men. Further, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America says 37% of people with generalized anxiety disorder sought professional help. So, while anxiety may be due to unintentionally stretching yourself too thin, don't rule out a mental health disorder. Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns or questions about your mental or physical wellbeing.

Everyone, however, can benefit from setting healthy boundaries. When you establish healthy boundaries, you allow others to be seen and heard while respecting your own needs and wants. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- **Understand your stressors and define your limits.** To start, write down what is causing you stress. Is it constantly checking your phone for work emails? A group text that never stops pinging with notifications? Seeing your stressors on paper may help you brainstorm ways to prevent them from happening. Your limit may be to only work a certain number of hours in the day or cut back screen time. By also writing your limits down, you can hold yourself accountable.
- **Start with small, consistent adjustments.** Set yourself up for success with attainable changes. You'll be amazed at how even the smallest tweaks will snowball and impact your mental wellbeing. This could include disabling notifications on your phone, creating focus time blocks in your calendar and distancing yourself from relationships that leave you feeling less than. If you ever waver on whether to take on a "one more," ask yourself if the to-do is in line with your defined limits.
- **Practice self-compassion.** There will be tasks, events and situations that blindside you. There will be others you take on against your better judgment. Give yourself some grace! Acknowledge the situation and then communicate to others how you're feeling and ask for help. We're all human. You may be surprised at how compassionate others can be.

Setting healthy boundaries is something you'll likely need to revisit in different seasons of your life (which is why it's good to write them down). Making your mental wellbeing a priority and demonstrating how to do so through your actions allows you to set an example for family, friends and coworkers.

## **12 Mental Health Book Recommendations**

Reading can be a powerful tool for healing and personal growth, especially when it comes to one's mental health. Whether you're seeking practical advice, personal narratives or expert insights, there's a wealth of knowledge to be found in mental health-related books. Here are [12 book recommendations](#) from Healthline that cover a wide range of topics — from overcoming trauma to battling burnout.

## **30 Journal Prompts for Improving Mental Health**

Journaling can be a valuable tool for improving your mental health, fostering self-awareness and promoting emotional wellbeing. By regularly engaging in journaling exercises, you can gain insight into thoughts and feelings, while navigating life's challenges with greater clarity. Consider incorporating these [journal prompts](#), as shared on PositivePsychology.com, into your daily routine to support your mental health journey.

## **National Support Resources**

The National Council aims to help build communities that are safer and healthier for everyone. Take a minute to check out these resources:

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress; prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones; and best practices for professionals in the U.S.
- [The SAMHSA Helpline](#): SAMHSA's national helpline is a free, confidential information service that provides treatment and support referrals 24/7 to people facing mental illness and addictions. Call 800-662-4357 (HELP) for support.
- [FindTreatment.gov](#): SAMHSA's confidential and anonymous resource for people seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the U.S. and its territories.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#): A national organization that provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.
- [The Trevor Project](#): A nonprofit offering 24/7 crisis support services for LGBTQ+ young people. Text, chat or call any time to reach a trained counselor.

## SHAREABLE GRAPHICS

We encourage you to use our [Mental Health Awareness Month graphics](#) across social media this month.



Feel free to use these hashtags:

**#MentalHealthAwarenessMonth**

**#FourWaysForward**

Be sure to tag the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and Mental Health First Aid USA in your posts so we can follow your activity!



<https://www.instagram.com/nationalcouncil/>

<https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealth-firstaidusa/>



<https://twitter.com/nationalcouncil>

<https://twitter.com/MHFirstAidUSA>



<https://www.facebook.com/TheNationalCouncil/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealth-FirstAidUSA/>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/national-council-for-mental-wellbeing>

## **Email Signature**

Are you a First Aider? To let others in your company or personal network know you're available to have honest conversations or lend an empathetic ear, consider using this [Outlook signature graphic](#).



*I am trained in*  
**Mental Health  
FIRST AID**

***Thank you for downloading our  
Mental Health Awareness Month toolkit!***

**We hope you've found these resources helpful in recognizing and celebrating the importance of mental wellbeing for yourself and others. Together, we can be the difference in changing conversations around mental health throughout the month and year.**

