



Office of Mental Health

Dear Fellow New Yorkers,

The [Office of Mental Health](#) is pleased to join with individuals and organizations across New York State, the United States, and the world as we recognize May as Mental Health Month.

One in five New York residents will experience a mental illness in their lifetime, yet many of our family members, friends, and neighbors do not seek treatment. The question is why and the answer all too often is the stigma and fear of discrimination for living with a mental illness. Many will suffer for years untreated, being unable to lead full and productive lives. We must tear down the terrible wall of stigma and eliminate any shame associated with mental illness.

Mental health and physical health must be one and the same, and equally important. If we teach our children in our schools how to be physically healthy, then we need to teach our children in our schools about being mentally healthy. When we see our doctor for our physical health, we fill out questionnaires in their office and ask without fear or shame questions about our physical health. We need the same freedom of questions and discussion for our mental health. Just as we talk to our friends and neighbors about our physical pains, our trips to emergency rooms or our surgeries, we should be able to talk about our mental pain, about how we have sought medication or therapy for it, and how we are getting ourselves well. When that conversation with friends, in school, and in the doctor's office is as easy for mental health as for our physical health, we know that we are winning the battle against stigma.

Across New York State, integrated physical and mental health care is becoming a reality, supported by numerous state initiatives to educate and finance screening and treatment for mental health problems in a primary care physician's office. Soon, when you visit with your doctor, you will be asked simple questions about how you feel, such as do you have little interest or pleasure in things, are you feeling down, depressed or hopeless? These questions help your doctor screen for depression and other questions will alert your doctor to problems with anxiety or substance use.

With new programs such as [Healthy Steps](#), we are helping pediatric practices screen children from birth to age five for behavioral concerns and helping families find the help they need, just as we screen that your child is growing as he or she should and meets usual developmental milestones. Through innovative services such as [Project TEACH](#), we are linking child psychiatrists with primary care doctors throughout the state to provide real time consultation services and videoconference, enabling families to work with their pediatricians on issues of mental health for their children. We have expanded [OnTrackNY](#) throughout the state, more than quadrupling the capacity of our nationally recognized program that helps young adults

experiencing their first episode of psychosis stay in school, keep their job, strengthen their family and social relationships and avoid disruptive hospitalizations.

We are developing [new community-based and mobile mental health services](#) aimed at increasing access, quality, and availability of mental health services where they matter most, close to home. We have created nearly 40,000 supportive housing units and [expanded employment assistance](#) for individuals with mental illness, as they provide the stability needed to build healthy and happy lives. Under [Medicaid redesign](#), we are pursuing a seamless system of mental health care, primary care, and care for substance use disorders, with a goal of better population health for all New Yorkers. Through [national and state parity laws](#), insurers are now required to cover mental and physical illness equally!

These experiences and services are normalizing mental health beginning at birth, continuing throughout life, and in all facets of our communities, one doctor visit, one counseling session, one education session, one conversation at a time. We all need to join the battle against stigma and make mental health a normal and vibrant part of our lives!

As always, if you or someone you know needs help [finding mental health services](#) in New York State, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Mental Health directly at 800-597-8481 or via [the OMH Website](#).

Sincerely,

Dr. Ann Marie T. Sullivan
Commissioner
New York State Office of Mental Health