



EMPOWERED

IMPROVING LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

By Alex Asare

Did you know that in any given year around 1 in 5 American adults will have a diagnosable mental health condition? That's 52.9 million people. In addition, people with marginalized identities are more likely to develop a mental health challenge. Not only do these challenges impact millions of Americans, but poor mental health can have serious ripple effects into other parts of life. For example, people with depression have a 40% higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than those without. In adolescents, students with significant symptoms of depression are more than twice as likely to drop out of school.

The impact poor mental health has on families is also detrimental. At least 8.4 million adults in the United States provide care to an adult with a mental or emotional health issue. The effects on the community are compounded. Of those experiencing homelessness 20.8% live with a mental health disorder, 37% of incarcerated adults in state and federal prisons have a mental health disorder, and 70% of youth in the juvenile system experience mental illness. Consequently, untreated mental health disorders, like anxiety and depression, cost the global economy \$1 trillion in

productivity annually.

If mental health challenges are so common and impact so many around us, why is it so hard to talk about and acknowledge it? Stigma is still a large factor regarding that. Recognizing May as Mental Health Awareness Month is an important step to break the stigma that having a mental health challenge reflects personal weakness. Social media has begun to

normalize and bring awareness to mental health. However, exaggeration, inaccuracy, and comedy are all still regularly used to spread misinformation and disparage those struggling with their mental health. This only reinforces the shame and isolation that those with mental health disorders can feel.

As the statistics above show, mental health impacts everyone, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, through education and compassion, we can change the way we

respond. Speaking up about mental health and bringing awareness to its effects can make an impact on American society and culture. This month, take the time to check in with yourself and your loved ones. Actively listen to what they say, if they choose to be vulnerable. Additionally, don't pass judgment on →



Mental Health Month continued

those who are experiencing untreated mental health disorders or those who choose to be open about their challenges.



[Download the Back to Basics mental health month toolkit from Mental Health America here.](#)

If you or a loved one is struggling, know that you are not alone. Call [Colorado Crisis Services](#) at 1-844-493-8255 or text Talk to 38255 for support.

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ADVOCATE Maggie Philips

This month, we're highlighting someone near and dear to our hearts, Maggie Phillips (she/her). Maggie has been with Envision:You since its inception, ensuring its operations run smoothly as the Director of Operations. She is also the co-owner and CEO of OUT FRONT Magazine, Colorado's primary LGBTQ+ media since 1976. Maggie is involved in these spaces because she is passionate about supporting the LGBTQ+ community. In her own life and in her work, she has seen first-hand how disproportionately the queer community is impacted by mental health and substance use disorders. She got involved with Envision:You because she wanted to help LGBTQ+ community members improve their well-being. In her work with Envision:You and OUT FRONT Magazine, she strives to make the community heard, whether that is through inclusive representation or supporting programming like the provider training program. When she's not wearing her Director or CEO hat, you might just find her in her happy place in the mountains training for her 10th 14er, or hanging out with her husband, two cats, and two birds in Westminster.


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FRESH PRESS

The Trevor Project released a research brief early this year discussing the impact of substance use on suicide risk for LGBTQ+ youth. They used data from the [2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#), allowing them to take a more comprehensive look at the community to include voices that are often left out of research, like transgender and gender expansive youth as well as LGBTQ+ youth of color. The [data shows](#) that across the board LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of substance use than their cis, straight peers, and that regular substance use is linked to a higher chance of committing suicide. Regular substance use was also reported more often for LGBTQ+ youth who said that they dealt with unsupportive and anti-LGBTQ+ environments, indicating that connection and acceptance are hugely important for LGBTQ+ youths physical and mental health.


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5 HEALTHY TIPS

...to be a better active listener.

- 1 Repeat people's last words back to them.** Don't rephrase in your own words unless you need to for understanding.
- 2 Offer nonverbal cues** that you are listening to the other person. Do this if it is natural to you, don't try to fake it.
- 3 Minimize distractions** as much as possible, including muting technology.
- 4 Don't rehearse your response while the other person is talking.** Take the time you need to respond.
- 5 Manage your own emotional response** as you listen.

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