



Help & Hope for YOUTH

A multi-sector initiative to reduce stigma associated with mental health conditions so youth (ages 10-24) seek help when experiencing signs or symptoms of mental illness or behavioral health issues

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Southern Arizona (NAMI SA), in collaboration with the University of Arizona (UA) Department of Family & Community Medicine (DFCM), and the UA Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW), has begun a multi-sector initiative with the goal to reduce stigma associated with mental illness so youth (ages 10-24) seek help when experiencing signs or symptoms of mental illness or behavioral health issues

Reducing the Stigma of Mental Illness

Youth mental health is worsening as young people are increasingly vulnerable to depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness. According to Mental Health America's recent report, The State of Mental Health in America 2020, youth depression rates have risen from 8.5% in 2011 to 13.01% in 2020. In Arizona, 13% of youth reported suffering at least one major depressive episode in the past year and 9% had severe depression. On both of these measures, Arizona fares worse than the national average. Of youth with major depression, 60% did not receive any mental health treatment.

Approximately 50% of lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% begin by age 24. Yet the average length of time between when symptoms first appear and when intervention is accessed is approximately 11 years. Stigma is still the single biggest deterrent to mental health treatment and recovery.

Mental illness stigma disproportionately affects help seeking among youth as well as ethnic minorities. If untreated, mental health disorders can lead to skipping school, substance abuse, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, dropping out or being expelled from school, violence, and suicide or a psychotic episode. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for ages 10-24.

It's time to end the stigma. To improve outcomes for young people, NAMI SA launched a major effort to reduce the stigma of living with and seeking services for mental health conditions for youth ages 10-24.

To achieve our goal, we are focusing on three primary objectives:

1. Build capacity to improve youth mental health in Pima, Pinal, Cochise and Santa Cruz Counties.

Key to the long-term success of this initiative is a strong collaboration of organizations and individuals—the Help & Hope for YOUTH Alliance—who understand the importance of stigma elimination and join in advocacy and educational efforts. The Alliance is composed of mental health organizations and providers, school districts and associations, faith, business and community

leaders. Activities are directed toward: 1) Getting information out to the community on stigma (in both English and Spanish), 2) promoting help seeking, 3) ensuring information on resources is widespread and easily available, and 4) developing long-term funding and in-kind support to sustain efforts.

2. Widely disseminate mental health education and training and information on mental health resources in four counties.

Ending the Silence (ETS), NAMI's effective stigma reduction program, is being expanded to more middle and high schools throughout Southern Arizona. Text, Talk, Act, a text-messaging platform to guide conversations about mental health, and Not Broken, an Arizona Public Media documentary on youth mental illness, are available to schools and youth-serving organizations. Other mental health programs and curricula are being reviewed and made available. Social media and events are additional strategies planned to reduce stigma among youth.

3. Advocate for State-wide systemic change

The collective leadership of the Help & Hope for YOUth Alliance enables us to advocate for policy changes in Arizona to ensure youth are educated to seek the mental health care they need and that the care is available. Systemic change will involve bringing together providers of youth mental/behavioral health services, including primary care providers in integrated healthcare settings, and youth, to conduct a dialogue that leads to early intervention and improved access to appropriate mental /behavioral health services. Help & Hope for YOUth has created a Youth Task Force to inform the work of the initiative. And behavioral health providers and schools have come together to collaborate on increasing access to services through schools.

Outcome Measurement

Help & Hope for YOUth is measuring: 1) changes in knowledge about mental illness, 2) attitudes toward people with mental illness and 3) willingness to associate with peers with mental illness among youth who participate in stigma reduction activities. We are also striving to measure help seeking by youth who report: 1) talking to a family member or friend about mental illness symptoms they are experiencing, 2) listening to a friend and offering help, and 3) specifically asking for help for themselves or a peer. Our three-year goal is an 18% reduction in stigma indicators and an 18% increase in help-seeking behaviors among youth who participate in stigma reduction activities. Help & Hope for YOUth also aims to track improved community-wide collaboration and advances in the local mental health system for youth and their families.

Join Us

We are bringing together many organizations and individuals who collectively can take on educating a new generation to be free from stigma in how they view and treat themselves and others. We are committed to ensuring that more children and teens receive the help they need to begin recovery and prevent mental health issues from spiraling out of control.

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Southern Arizona

The mission of NAMI SA is to improve the quality of life for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI SA is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and serves Southern Arizona, primarily Tucson and Pima County, through education, advocacy and support at no cost to anyone affected by mental illnesses. A grassroots non-profit organization, NAMI SA was started by volunteers in 1983.