

**ATLANTIC COUNTY**  
**PROUD TO BE**  
**STIGMA FREE**

**Stigma Free**  
**Atlantic Collaborative**  
**Business & Organization Toolkit**

**A Campaign Against the Stigma of Mental Health and  
Substance Use Disorders in Atlantic County**

For further information or an electronic version of this toolkit, please  
visit: [atlantic-county.org/stigmafree](http://atlantic-county.org/stigmafree)

**#stigmafreeatlantic**



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The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative would like to thank Bergen County for their creation of the original toolkit, and thank multiple other counties for subsequent toolkits and their generous sharing of their resources.

Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative Workgroup:  
Gretchen Halfpenny, Atlantic County Overdose Fatality Review Team (APR)  
Vicki Phillips, Mental Health Association in Atlantic County  
Kathleen Quish, Atlantic County Intergenerational Services  
Doug Quick, Atlantic Prevention Resources (APR)  
Laurie Smith, Join Together Atlantic County (APR)  
Brian Wilson, Atlantic County Substance Abuse Services

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Dennis Levinson  
*County Executive*

# Atlantic County

## Executive Office

1333 Atlantic Avenue  
Atlantic City, New Jersey 08401

609/343-2201 FAX: 343-2194  
TDD: 348-5551

October 4, 2022

Dear Friends,

We know that people with mental health and substance use disorders can recover with appropriate supports and services in the community, yet many avoid seeking help due to stigmas and the fear of discrimination.

The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative was created to bring mental health and substance use disorders out of the shadows and encourage treatment and support. Greater public awareness about these conditions can help change negative attitudes and behaviors. While each of us can play a role in supporting those whose lives are affected by these conditions, addressing the stigma associated with them requires a broader, collaborative approach. That is why Atlantic County and several other counties in New Jersey have initiated Stigma Free community-wide campaigns.

Over the past several months, a workgroup has been meeting to develop toolkits to help guide municipalities, schools, businesses, faith-based and civic organizations. Each toolkit includes an action plan, talking points, promotional materials, resource list and more. We encourage you to review the materials and consider joining this countywide effort.

Healing and recovery are attainable, but they cannot be accomplished in seclusion. Help us eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with those challenged by mental health and substance disorders so they will be encouraged to seek and accept help.

We appreciate your consideration and thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Dennis Levinson  
County Executive

## Introduction/Purpose

The **Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative** is a countywide program that aims to reduce the negative beliefs associated with mental health and substance use disorders. We are dedicated to raising awareness around mental health and substance use disorders. Our vision is to create a culture where residents feel supported by their community and feel free to seek treatment for the disorders without fear of being outcast.

**Stigma** is a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment of others. When an individual is labeled by their illness, they experience judgment and prejudice. It brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As a result, it is one of the primary reasons individuals do not seek help when they experience symptoms of a mental health or substance use disorder.

The toolkit provides a community guide with relevant information in a user-friendly way that highlights the key components of a Stigma Free Collaborative campaign for business or community organizations. The toolkit will be available to all who are interested in implementing a stigma free workplace to reduce the negative impact of stigma pertaining to mental health and substance use disorders in our communities. Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative would like to expand the county's awareness of stigma and how it can result in community members not seeking treatment.

### **Joining the Stigma Free Initiative will:**

- Educate residents that mental health and substance use disorders are diseases and must be treated as such
- Raise awareness of the prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in our community
- Provide public interest in learning what is "Stigma Free"
- Provide residents an opportunity to become involved in their community
- Allow people living with the disease to feel supported by their community and thus decrease feelings of isolation and shame
- Link people in need to local mental health and substance use resources
- Use inclusive, accepting and judgement-free language and choices
- Raises awareness that care is accessible regardless of income

### ***What is a mental health disorder?***

Mental health disorders refer to disorders generally characterized by dysregulation of mood, thought, and/or behavior. Mental health disorders encompass a variety of disorders ranging from depression and anxiety to substance and alcohol use disorder and bipolar disorder. Mental health disorders can affect persons of any age, race, gender, sexual identity, religion or income.

### ***What is a co-occurring disorder?***

The term co-occurring disorder replaces the terms dual disorder and dual diagnosis when referring to an individual who has a co-existing mental health and a substance use disorder.

While commonly used to refer to the combination of substance use and mental disorders, the term also refers to other combinations of disorders (such a mental disorder and intellectual disability).

## **Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders**

The World Health Organization ranks mental health disorders as the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada. Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety or alcohol and substance use disorders, are extremely common in America.

- 21% of U.S. adults experienced a mental health disorder in 2020 (52.9 million people), this represents 1 in 5 adults
- 5.6% of U.S. adults experienced a serious mental health disorder in 2020 (14.2 million people), this represents 1 in 20 adults
- 16.5% of U.S. youth aged 6-17 experienced a mental health disorder in 2016 (7.7 million people)
- 6.7% of U.S. adults experienced a co-occurring substance use and mental health disorder in 2020 (17 million people)
- The average delay between onset of mental health symptoms and treatment is 11 years
- People with depression have a 40% higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population. People with serious mental health disorders are nearly twice as likely to develop these conditions
- The rate of unemployment is higher among U.S. adults who have mental health disorders (6.4%), compared to those who do not (5.1%)
- At least 8.4 million people in the U.S. provide care to an adult with a mental or emotional health issue
- Caregivers of adults with mental or emotional health issues spend an average of 32 hours per week providing unpaid care
- Across the U.S. economy, serious mental health disorder causes \$193.2 billion in lost earnings each year
- 20.8% of people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. have a serious mental health condition
- 37% of adults incarcerated in the state and federal prison system have a diagnosed mental health disorder
- 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health condition
- 8.4% of Active Component service members in the U.S. military experienced a mental health or substance use condition in 2019
- 46% of people who die by suicide had a diagnosed mental health condition
- 90% of people who die by suicide had shown symptoms of a mental health condition, according to interviews with family, friends and medical professionals (also known as psychological autopsy)
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are 4x more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth
- 78% of people who die by suicide are male
- Transgender adults are nearly 12x more likely to attempt suicide than the general population

***What is substance use disorder?***

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a complex condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s) such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired. People keep using the substance even when they know it is causing or will cause problems.

American Psychiatric Association

## **Prevalence of Substance Use Disorder (SUD)**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration reported:

- In 2020, 40.3 million people aged 12 or older (or 14.5 percent) had a SUD in the past year
- 28.3 million people (of the 40.3 million) had an alcohol use disorder
- 18.4 million had an illicit drug use disorder
- 6.5 million had both an alcohol use disorder and an illicit drug use disorder
- Among the 138.5 million current alcohol users aged 12 or older in 2020, 61.6 million people (or 44.4 percent) were past month binge drinkers
- 17.9 percent of people aged 12 or older (49.6 million people) have used marijuana this past year
- Over 3.3 million people used cocaine, 3.3 million misused prescription stimulants, and 1.5 million used methamphetamines
- Among people aged 12 or older in 2020, 3.4% (or 9.5 million people) misused opioids in the past year. Among the 9.5 million people who misused opioids in the past year, 9.3 million people misused prescription pain relievers and 902,000 people used heroin
- Among people aged 12 or older in 2020, 2.8 million people, initiated marijuana use in the past year

One of the primary reasons individuals fail to seek the help they need is due to the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders. Main reasons cited are shame and fear of judgment from friends, family, and co-workers. Such judgment is often rooted in a lack of knowledge or training. It is our goal to disseminate information and foster a stigma free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover.

## The Stigma Free Atlantic Initiative

Stigma Free Atlantic aims to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma. This initiative intends to engage community members to be inclusive and judgment free and educate all to use appropriate language choices. The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative is working with local businesses/organizations to help them enact stigma free practices.



Establishing a Stigma Free business/organization will raise awareness of the local mental health and substance use resources available, so no resident feels hopeless or alone. Stigma Free Atlantic will encourage residents to break down barriers, be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed. Mental health and substance use disorders have the potential to worsen if left untreated, and complications arise when individuals do not seek help. It is essential that residents seek care and support as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided.

**Who is involved?** Everyone is involved. This countywide initiative includes all Atlantic County residents, from youth to senior populations, including schools, businesses, municipal leaders, faith-based and civic organizations; every community member is a key stakeholder. We want to link all stakeholders to training opportunities and awareness events aimed at increasing public knowledge about mental health and substance use disorders, the proper language to use to avoid stigmas and exclusion, and knowledge of local resources available to Atlantic County businesses/organizations.

The following pages include a Stigma Free toolkit for Atlantic County businesses and organizations interested in joining the Stigma Free Atlantic Initiative. By creating stigma free policies, signing the Stigma Free Pledge and by taking a few action steps, your organization will be joining a rapidly growing network dedicated to improving the mental health of our Atlantic County community. Additional information is available at [atlantic-county.org/stigmafree](http://atlantic-county.org/stigmafree).

## **Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Education**

Mental health and substance use issues affect everyone. This year, one in five people will experience a mental health or substance use challenge severe enough to interfere with daily living.

In spite of how common these struggles are, it can be difficult for people to know what to do when they experience a mental health or substance use challenge. Some people struggle to find the right words to describe how they feel. It can be even harder to find the right person to talk to. These challenges can prevent people from understanding their struggles and getting the help that they need.

Mental health and substance use education is a key part of overcoming these challenges, making it a vital resource for people living their daily lives. It is valuable wherever people live, learn, work, worship and play.

Improving our understanding of mental health through promotion and education empowers people by helping them develop the skills they need to care for themselves, make good health care decisions, and access the resources they need.

Understanding mental health and substance use disorders is the first step in combating the stigma associated with these illnesses. Poor understanding of mental health and substance use can lead to discrimination and unhealthy coping behaviors, and prevent people from asking for help.

**The following resources can be utilized for sponsoring educational opportunities within your community:**

### **What Does It Mean to Be Stigma Free?**

This training hosted by the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative will focus on:

- What is Stigma?

- How does stigma change the way we think and respond?

- Personal stories of stigma.

- How simple changes can help those dealing with mental health and substance use challenges.

For more information contact: [StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org](mailto:StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org)



## Mental Health First Aid Training

Several Atlantic County agencies have Mental Health First Aid certified trainers and offer Mental Health First Aid training sessions for their employees and residents. For more information on scheduling or attending Mental Health First Aid Training contact the Mental Health Association NJ in Atlantic County at (609) 652-3800.

### What is Mental Health First Aid?

- Evidence-based interactive course that spans one 8-hour or two 4-hour sessions
- Teaches students the signs of mental illness and substance abuse
- Introduces a five-step action plan to initiate referral to mental health resources

### Why is Mental Health First Aid Important?

- Just like CPR, it is a vital skill that improves the well-being of our community
- Helps to eliminate stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse
- Promotes recovery and resiliency



## Drug and Alcohol Prevention Presentations and Trainings

Join Together Atlantic County is a substance misuse prevention coalition, funded through multiple state and federal grants. The coalition offers drug and alcohol prevention presentations and training. For more information contact [JTACNJ@atlprev.org](mailto:JTACNJ@atlprev.org) or call (609) 272-0101 Ext 11.



Question Persuade Refer  
Ask a Question. Stop a Suicide.

## QPR Training

Question. Persuade. Refer.

### QPR Mission:

The QPR mission is to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. The signs of crisis are all around us. We believe that quality education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know. This 60-90 minute training offers participants a two-year certification.

### As a QPR-trained Gatekeeper you will learn to:

- Recognize the warning signs of suicide
- Know how to offer hope
- Know how to get help and save a life

### Who is a Gatekeeper?

According to the Surgeon General's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (2001), a Gatekeeper is someone in a position to recognize a crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide.

Gatekeepers can be anyone, but include parents, friends, neighbors, teachers, school staff, ministers, doctors, nurses, offices supervisors, squad leaders, foremen, police officers, advisors, caseworkers, firefighters, and many others who are strategically positioned to recognize and refer someone at risk of suicide.

For more information contact:  
[StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org](mailto:StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org)



## Mental Health First Aid Training for Veterans



*“Mental health First Aid is a valuable resource that can make a difference in the lives of more than 22 million veterans, their families and the communities they live in.”*

### **Why Mental Health First Aid for Veterans, service members, and their families?**

While military service often fosters resilience in individuals and families, some service members may experience mental health or substance use challenges. Thirty percent of active duty and reserve military personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan have a mental health condition requiring treatment— approximately 730,000 men and women, with many experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression.

### **Individuals trained in Mental Health First Aid can help to:**

- Break down the stigma associated with mental illness like anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and substance use disorders
- Reach out to those who suffer in silence, reluctant to seek help
- Let veterans know that support is available in their community
- Provide community resources information

### **What you learn**

Key information for military members, veterans and their families include:

- A discussion of military culture and its relevance to the topic of mental health
- A discussion of the specific risk factors faced by many service members and their families such as trauma, both mental and physical, stress, separation, etc.
- Applying action plans in a number of scenarios designed specifically for service members, their families and those that support them
- A review of common mental health resources for service members, their families and those who support them

For more information on MHFA for Veterans contact:  
Ruth Kaluski at [RKaluski@mhanj.org](mailto:RKaluski@mhanj.org)

## Stigma Free Action Plan

**Below are some ideas to help your business become stigma free**

- Educate employees about the signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use disorders.
- Have your company leaders sign the Stigma Free Pledge and encourage all employees to also sign.
- Provide education to address mental health stigma and bias.
- Encourage employees to use inclusive communications and language.
- Promote your business/organization as a stigma free workplace using window decals, employee badges, yard signs or other promotional materials (see examples on page 17).
- Participate in Atlantic County's Stigma Free Initiative.
- Include "We Support Stigma Free" tagline/image on marketing material, website, social media, etc.
- Host a Stigma Free or mental health or substance use disorder charity walk.
- Set up a stigma free booth at an employee wellness fair or within your business.
- Collaborate with your local schools. Host a Stigma Free poster or essay contest within the school, participate in the schools Week of Respect Celebration in October or sponsor a stigma free event in the school.
- Collaborate with local community leaders to host a town-wide stigma free celebration.
- Distribute stigma free promotional materials to employees to place on their own lawns, vehicles and windows.

Remember that Stigma Free is a *community effort*; think about the strengths of your business/organization and encourage local residents to take initiative in your Stigma Free Campaign.

## **Stigma Free Initiative Talking Points**

***Language can create stigma. It is important that all staff or members understand and endorse the appropriate way to speak about mental health and substance use disorders.***

- Mental health and substance use disorders are a worldwide leading cause of disability impacting the entire community-socially, emotionally, behaviorally and economically.
- Stigma often prevents people from seeking help/treatment.
- This movement transcends any religious/spiritual affiliation, economic strata, race/ethnicity or gender; it does not discriminate.
- We will promote programs that neutralize/eliminate fears.
- We will identify and update available resources for education, treatment, recovery and support.
- We will encourage community well-being, encouraging help seeking behavior as well as raise awareness of actors/events that may negatively impact mental health and substance use disorders and well-being.
- We will hold events, rallies, town halls, etc. to bring light to this topic.
- We will encourage the use of mental health and substance use disorder recovery education.
- We will encourage a culture where it is considered wise to take care of your own mental health and seek treatment and sober living activities.
- We will utilize neutral, sensitive and empowering language and provide access to current recommendations for inclusive language choices.
- We will remove stigmatizing labels surrounding mental health or mental health conditions and substance use disorders.
- We will encourage universal acceptance.
- We encourage everyone to play a part in this movement-from youth to senior populations.

## Language Matters!

Language is powerful – especially when talking about mental health and substance use disorders. Stigmatizing language perpetuates negative perceptions. “Person First” language focuses on the person, not the disease.

### Stigma Free Language

#### *When Discussing Mental Health Disorders*

Preferred Language:	Instead Of:
She is a person living with mental health or substance use challenges or a psychiatric disability	She is a patient
He is a person living with a disability	He is disabled/handicapped
She is a child without disabilities	She is normal
He is a person living with bipolar disorder diagnosis He is a person living with bipolar disorder	He is (a) bipolar
He has a mental health problem or challenge	She is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed/psycho/insane/lunatic
She is a person with lived experience of a mental health condition	She is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed/psycho/insane/lunatic
He is a person living with a brain injury	He is brain damaged
He experiences symptoms of psychosis/ He hears voices	He is psychotic
She is a person living with an intellectual disability	She is mentally retarded
He is a person living with autism	He is autistic
Is receiving mental health services	Mental health patient/case
Attempted suicide	Unsuccessful suicide
Died by suicide	Committed suicide
A student receiving special education services	Special education student
Experiencing, or being treated for, or has a diagnosis of, or a history of, mental illness	Suffering with, or a victim of mental health

## Stigma Free Language

### *When Discussing Substance Use Disorders*

Preferred Language:	Instead Of:
Person with a substance use disorder	Addict, junkie, druggie
Person living in recovery	Ex-addict
Person living with an addiction	Battling/Suffering from an addiction
Person arrested for drug violation	Drug offender
Chooses not to at this point	Non-compliant/bombed out
Medication is a treatment tool	Medication is a crutch
Had a setback	Relapsed
Maintained recovery	Stayed clean
Positive drug screen	Dirty drug screen
Person experiencing alcohol/drug problem	Abuser/junkie
Substance use disorder	Drug Habit
Misuse or harmful use	Abuse
Actively/not actively using	Clean/Dirty
Person in risky use or misuse	User
Person with an alcohol use disorder	Alcoholic, drunk
Medication-assisted treatment	Replacement or substitution therapy

## Pledge Form

### Join the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative

We Stand with Those Impacted by Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders!

We pledge to increase awareness and greater understanding of mental health & substance use disorders and promise to work to eliminate stigma and discrimination within our organization and larger community. We will strive to promote a message of hope and the belief that healing and recovery are attainable!

### #StigmaFreeAtlantic

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency/Affiliation (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please submit completed pledge forms to  
StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org



## Sample Promotional Materials

The following images are examples of promotional materials that your collaborative may want to order from your local printer. The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative may have a limited number of materials. For more information contact: [StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org](mailto:StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org)



Sample Lawns Signs/Posters



Pins



Decals

## Sample Press Release

### For Immediate Release

Contact Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Date:

#### **[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME] DECLARES ITSELF STIGMA FREE**

Town, NJ- Date- One in five adults experience a diagnosable mental health disorder every year. One in seven adults experience a diagnosable substance use disorder every year. Many of these individuals do not seek help because of fear of shame or judgment from friends, family and co-workers. On [DATE] [BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME] made the first steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorder. The elimination of mental health stigma will allow residents to get the resources they need without judgment.

[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME] representatives adopted a policy designating the business/organization a Stigma Free Workplace in order to create an environment in which employees and residents will feel free to seek treatment for mental health and/or substance use disorder without the fear of being stigmatized. [BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME] joins the County of Atlantic declaring itself as a Stigma Free Community.

[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME] hopes to raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders, provide an effective way to reduce the stigma associated with the diseases, promote the use of inclusive language and encourage those who are affected to seek services and feel supported. The establishment of this Stigma Free Workplace will raise awareness of local mental health resources so no one resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. The elimination of stigma will enable residents to ask for help when needed so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided.

We urge anyone who would like more information on the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative to contact [StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org](mailto:StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org) and to help us eliminate stigma and promote wellness amongst all Atlantic County residents.