



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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MENTAL HEALTH IS “EVERYBODY’S BUSINESS” *Clients Remove Labels and Eliminate Stigma*

San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) officials today were joined by dozens of people living with a mental illness, together with their family and friends to bring awareness to stigma and how everybody plays a role in eliminating it.

“Labels hurt. Stigma hurts,” Markov Manalo, Recovery Educator/Employment Coordinator with Recovery Innovations of California, told the group, which gathered outside the County Administration Center to share their stories of mental illness and talk about how stigma has impacted their lives.

Mental health clients wore brightly-colored t-shirts with labels naming their mental illness. Friends and relatives wore t-shirts indicating their relation to the clients.

“It is so easy to label someone and overlook what’s inside. Today, we are removing those labels and putting an end to stigma,” added Manalo, who guided the group to remove the labels in an effort to eliminate stigma.

The “Mental Health—Everybody’s Business” event is one of many activities taking place throughout the county during May, which is designated as Mental Health Month across the nation. The event was organized by HHSA, Community Health Improvement Partners, Family and Youth Roundtable, Mental Health America, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Recovery Innovations of California and the mental health clubhouses in the county.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in four adults and one in five children experience a mental health disorder in any given year. A mental illness is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines.

“Mental disorders don’t discriminate; they affect people of all ages and socio-economic status,” said Supervisor Ron Roberts, Fourth District, County Board of Supervisors. “The County of San Diego is committed to providing quality mental health services to individuals and families to help them lead more productive lives.”

About 61,000 children, adults, and older adults benefit from HHSA mental health services each year. It is estimated that as many as 80 percent of people suffering from a mental disorder can lead productive lives if they receive appropriate treatment. But many don’t seek treatment because of stigma and fear of rejection.

“Reaching people early is important. It means fewer symptoms, less intense disease, and maybe the avoidance of mental illness altogether,” said Nick Macchione, Director of HHSA. “Mental health is everybody’s business. And eliminating stigma is everybody’s responsibility.”

People suffering from a mental illness can access services by calling the County’s 24-hour, multi-lingual Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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