

Mental Health First Aid USA

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental illnesses, builds understanding of their impact, and overviews common supports. This 8-hour course uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to offer initial help in a mental health crisis and connect persons to the appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help care. The program also teaches the common risk factors and warning signs of specific types of illnesses, like anxiety, depression, substance use, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and schizophrenia.

Mental Health First Aid is included on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

Course Details

Mental Health First Aid teaches participants a five-step action plan, ALGEE, to support someone developing signs and symptoms of a mental illness or in an emotional crisis:

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- Listen nonjudgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies

Like CPR, Mental Health First Aid prepares participants to interact with a person in crisis and connect the person with help. First Aiders do not take on the role of professionals — they do not diagnose or provide any counseling or therapy. Instead, the program offers concrete tools and answers key questions, like “what do I do?” and “where can someone find help?” Certified Mental Health First Aid instructors provide a list of community healthcare providers and national resources, support groups, and online tools for mental health and addictions treatment and support. All trainees receive a program manual to compliment the course material.

Program Growth

Mental Health First Aid was introduced in the U.S. in 2008 and, to date, hundreds of thousands of people from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have taken the course. The course is offered to a variety of audiences, including hospital staff, employers and business leaders, faith communities, and law enforcement. Approximately 400 people are being trained each day with that number expected to increase.

In 2012, Youth Mental Health First Aid was introduced to prepare trainees to help youth ages 12-18 that may be developing or experiencing a mental health challenge. And in 2014 two specialized versions were introduced, Mental Health First Aid for Veterans and Mental Health First Aid for First Responders.

Mental Health First Aid was included in the Presidents plan to reduce gun violence and increase access mental health services. In 2014 Congress appropriated \$15 million to SAMHSA for training teachers and school personnel in the youth version of Mental Health first Aid; and another \$15 million is included in the President's 2015 budget proposal. The Mental Health First Aid (S.153/H.R. 274) has broad bi-partisan support and would authorize \$20 million annually for training the American public. Fifteen states have made Mental Health First Aid a priority, appropriating state funds including Texas that has allocated \$5 million.

To find a course or contact an instructor in your area, visit www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org.