

# Position Statement 17: Promotion of Mental Wellness

## Policy

Mental health is an essential component of overall health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> The very significant body of evidence that has been developed about prevention of mental and substance use conditions should guide policy makers to invest in proven prevention and wellness interventions. Mental Health America (MHA) needs to reach out to other health and wellness advocates to assure that mental health and substance use conditions are reframed as public health issues, on a par with the other major public health issues confronted by our society. Viewing mental wellness as the core of wellness and thus the core of public health, MHA is committed to develop a successful wellness agenda that integrates mental health and substance use issues with general health issues.

Regardless of the presence or absence of a disorder, all individuals and families are at risk of stress and situational psychological distress. To build and maintain well-being, people need to develop self understanding and what has been characterized as "emotional intelligence,"<sup>2</sup> coping skills, resilience, effective use of social supports, and openness and access to mental health and mental wellness counseling and advice. Strengthening an individual's mental health and promoting resilience to handling life's stressors not only reduces the risk of mental and substance use conditions but contributes to improved general health, well-being and productivity, and a healthier society. MHA is committed to developing and implementing the concept of mental wellness as a way of reaching out to all of society.

## Background

The realization that mental health is integral to overall health signals a fundamental change in our conceptualization of health - one that rejects the dualism of mind and body and realizes that the pursuit of health must be approached holistically by embracing a person's biology, psychology and social environment simultaneously.

The concept of wellness is holistic in its pursuit of optimal health for the individual, family, community and nation. Wellness is a strategy for living that seeks to achieve the highest level of positive participation that an individual can achieve in his/her life. Consistent with its holistic orientation, wellness has been defined as involving social, intellectual, spiritual, physical, emotional and occupational dimensions.

Wellness involves a set of life skills that promote well being and help to prevent the onset of illness. For individuals who have become ill, wellness seeks to shorten the duration of illness and the disability that may result from it. As such, wellness strategies promote recovery for persons with severe illnesses by providing treatments, skills and supports to maximize achievement of a person's idiosyncratic goals and their participation in their community.

Mental and substance abuse conditions are among the most common health disorders in the United States, affecting nearly 50% of adults at some time during their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 15% of adults will experience a substance use disorder, while approximately 25% of the adult population will experience both a mental and substance use condition.<sup>4</sup> The figures for children are comparable.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, there is growing evidence of the interaction between mental health conditions and other health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer<sup>6</sup>, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes<sup>7</sup>. When they co-occur and are not effectively treated in an integrated way, the course of illness is negatively affected, costs of treatment are increased and outcomes are typically worse<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, many of the chronic illnesses that account for approximately 75% of health care expenditures in the United States<sup>9</sup> have important behavioral health components such as inactivity, smoking, poor management of chronic stress, etc. It is imperative that we adopt an integrated approach to addressing the health and well-being of the population. Wellness strategies respond to this need.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychiatric disorders account for 5 of the 10 leading causes of disability.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, the WHO defines mental health broadly, to include mental wellness: "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."<sup>11</sup> The definition again underscores the inherent linkages between all components of health and, by implication, the need for an integrated approach to achieving health which is more than treatment.

Our medical care system is generally designed to diagnose and treat illness rather than to prevent its occurrence. Similarly, our public mental health "systems" are generally designed to provide care and services only to those individuals with the most serious mental health conditions. No public system is formally charged with the responsibility to carry out the critically important work of promoting health by fostering resilience and seeking to promote well being. Similarly, lack of early detection and effective treatment of the range of mental and substance use conditions remains a serious shortcoming of our current medical care system. As integral to overall health, the promotion of mental health, prevention and effective treatment of mental and substance use conditions are central to preserving our health.

We need a coherent and effective health promotion and disease prevention strategy in this country, both to reduce the number of individuals in need of care, and as a matter of prudent health economics. To ignore this imperative is to leave people unprotected in the face of many sources of risk and stress in a society in which many people work extended hours or multiple jobs and take little time off. One in three U.S. employees is chronically over-worked;<sup>12</sup> and the line between work and home life is often blurred, so that home may no longer be a place of rest. Increasingly people have come to understand the significance of their mental health as sleep and exercise come to feel like luxuries, and they experience lack of connection with family, neighbors, and community, and decline in trust.<sup>13</sup> Chronic inactivity, addictive behaviors such as tobacco and alcohol use, and poor diet all further contribute to the diminution of health.

Compounding the insidious stresses of modern life, most of us eventually encounter special challenges that test us and put our mental health and support systems at risk. For some, it is the stress of care-giving, family dissolution, or the death of a loved one. For others, it is living with

a chronic illness -- diabetes, cancer, an addiction, or a major mental health condition such as depression or schizophrenia. And even extraordinary stresses like domestic abuse, street crime, natural disasters, war and even terrorist incidents are a persistent threat. Mental wellness consists in developing the resiliency and the coping skills to deal with such challenges.

Modern society appears to cumulate and exacerbate many of these stressors. Thus, international studies indicate that Mexicans living in Mexico have far lower rates of mental health conditions than first and second generation Mexican immigrants living in the United States.[14](#)

Scientists have recognized protective factors that may ameliorate risks to our mental and general health. In recent years much has been learned about the importance of "promotive" factors as simple as exercise, good nutrition, adequate rest, healthy human interactions and support from peers. Employee assistance and substance use intervention programs at work, access to peer and professional counseling, and social inclusion for all are the key to enhancing health. These and other promotive measures need to be developed to cope with the risky situations and stressors that modern society imposes on all of us. A holistic approach takes into consideration appropriate developmental, cultural, and linguistic strategies to promoting wellness.

Wellness has great currency in contemporary life. It can be associated with five intellectual and social movements: holistic medicine, positive health, the independent living movement, public health/health promotion and the self help/mutual support movement[15](#). Each of these seeks to maximize health as defined by the WHO and inherently appreciates the integration of body, mind and the social environment.

The strategies that promote mental health and prevent mental and substance use conditions will have salutatory effects on health. They will have positive effects not only for individuals, but also for multiple sectors of society: in education (e.g., mentally healthy children can take fuller advantage of learning opportunities), in the economy (e.g., mentally healthy adults can be more effective in their job performance and thus benefit their families and employers), and in family life (e.g., strengthened families can stay together). There is a growing field of scholarly literature in this area[16](#).

In June of 2007 the National Mental Health Association was renamed Mental Health America (MHA), reflecting an intention to develop and implement new strategies to engage the general public in a holistic approach to health, which fully embraces the centrality of mental health to overall health. Promoting wellness strategies as relevant for the entire population is an integral part of this new direction for MHA as is detailed in this policy.

MHA envisages a society that addresses health comprehensively and from a public health perspective. That society would apply the growing body of research on health promotion and disease prevention to help people achieve mental health and wellness. This can be accomplished by a sustained effort to increase individual and community resources for resilience, focusing on prevention of harm by self-help and community and peer support. Such a society also would provide access to the more intensive treatment and supports to enable persons with serious mental health conditions to recover and lead productive and satisfying lives.

The concept of wellness recognized by the 2007 changes to the MHA mission statement represents a new policy direction for MHA, which broadens the organization's role to advocacy of the promotive measures that American society desperately needs to respond to the challenges of modern life and its multiple threats to our health and well-being. MHA believes that the concept of wellness is closely tied to the concept of recovery from mental health conditions, and that many of the tactics that are used to maintain good health also are useful in negotiating recovery from the disability associated with a chronic illness - including mental and substance use conditions. Wellness needs to be everyone's concern.

## Call to Action

A comprehensive public-health-oriented wellness strategy requires that mental health services include services to foster and maintain mental health including programs and services to prevent the initial onset of illness when possible, and treatment and support services for people who have become ill. No point on this continuum should be seen as less important than any other point.

The promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental and substance use conditions should be central to the public health agenda, as important as treatment and supports.

- Accelerated research is needed concerning effective prevention, promotion, and treatment interventions for all age and ethnic groups and across a wide range of behavioral health issues.
- Based on the considerable existing research and the work yet to be done, implementation of science based promotion and prevention approaches for the entire population must be a high priority at the national, state and local levels<sup>17</sup>. These approaches must be developed in culturally and linguistically competent ways for diverse populations with different needs and perspectives.
- Mental and substance use conditions should be detected early and treated effectively. Routine screening in schools, pediatric clinics, the workplace, primary care, among others should be the norm. When individuals are identified as needing care, adequate treatment systems that focus on recovery and resilience should be available along with needed supports. These interventions should be pursued in culturally and linguistically competent ways for diverse populations with different needs.
- Mental health promotion, prevention, treatment and recovery practices should reflect the diverse cultural norms that affect how people define mental health, promote health and seek help, diagnosis and treatment. Comprehensive health care reform must incorporate these cultural norms in order to increase the effectiveness of prevention and promotion interventions as well as the rates of diagnosis and treatment of mental and substance use conditions.
- Groups that challenge the validity of evidence-based mental health policy and the need for access to treatment for mental health and substance use conditions should be vigorously challenged.
- Community-, school- and employment-based mental health services and mental wellness programs should be established and supported.

### Effective Period

This policy was approved by the Mental Health America Board of Directors on January 19, 2008. It will remain in effect for five (5) years and is reviewed as required by the MHA Public Policy Committee.

**Expiration:** January 19, 2013

1. *As resoundingly concluded by The Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health; The President's New Freedom Commission Report, Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America; and The Institute of Medicine's Improving Health Care for Mental and Substance Use Conditions - each of which powerfully summarized the strength of the evidence supporting vigorous action to promote mental health in American society.*
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4. SAMHSA. (2008). Office of applied studies. *Substance abuse and mental health statistics*. Retrieved January 19 2008, from <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/>.
5. SAMHSA. (2008). Office of applied studies. *Substance abuse and mental health statistics*. Retrieved January 19, 2008, from <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/>.
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8. Moussavi, S., Chatterji, S., Verdes, E., Tandon, A., Patel, V., & Ustun, B. (2007). *Depression, chronic diseases, and decrements in health: evidence from the World Health Surveys*. *The Lancet*, 369, 1-8.
9. *Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease*. (2008). Retrieved January 19, 2008, from <http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/pdfs/ChronicDiseaseFactSheet.pdf>
10. WHO. (2008). *Mental health*. Retrieved January 19, 2008, from [http://www.who.int/topics/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/mental_health/en/)
11. WHO. (2008). *Mental Health*. Retrieved January 19, 2008, from [http://www.who.int/topics/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/mental_health/en/).
12. *Families and Work Institute* (2005). Retrieved January 19 2008, from <http://www.familiesandwork.org/>
13. *National Conference on Citizenship*. (2006). Retrieved January 19, 2008, from <http://www.ncoc.net/>.
14. Vega, W.A., Kolody, B., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Alderete, E., Catolano, R. & Caraveo-Andwaga, J. (1998). *Lifetime prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders among urban and rural Mexican Americans in California*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55, 771-778.
15. *Based on a 2007 review of the current literature conducted on behalf of MHA by the Center for Non-Profit Strategies*.
16. *The National Wellness Institute (Dr. Bill Hettler) was an early pioneer of the mental wellness concept, advocating a focus on six aspects of life: social, intellectual, spiritual, physical, emotional and occupational. The Institute and similar organizations have*

*developed numerous tools and resources, including a Lifestyle Assessment Questionnaire, that explore multiple dimensions of mental wellness. David Goleman's 1995 book, Emotional Intelligence, made the case that emotional intelligence can be learned and supported. Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer have proposed a model of emotional intelligence including five domains: knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others, and handling relationships. These are the core of the emotional intelligence concept described by Goleman.*

*"Emotional Intelligence," 9 Imagination, Cognition and Personality (1990), p. 185-210.*

17. *The following research articles provides support for the use of evidence-based practices in the treatment of mental health conditions related to wellness management. Mueser, K., Corrigan, P., Hilton, D.W., Tanzman, B., Schaub, A., Gingerich, S., Essock, S.M., Tarrier, N., Morey, B., Vogel-Scibilia, S., & Herz, M.I. (2002). Illness Management and Recovery: A Review of the Research. Psychiatric Services, 53 (10). 1272-1284. - Lincoln, T. M., Wilhelma, K., & Nestoriuca, Y. (2007). Effectiveness of psychoeducation for relapse, symptoms, knowledge, adherence and functioning in psychotic disorders: A meta-analysis. Schizophrenia Research, 96, 232-245. - Corrigan, P. W., Mueser, K. T., Bond, G. R., Drake, R. E., & Solomon, P. (2008). The Principles and Practice of Psychiatric Rehabilitation: An Empirical Approach. New York: Guilford Press.*