



***Toward
Better
Mental Health
in Minnesota:
A Community
Approach***

A Public Health Approach to Mental Health

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Minnesota Partnerships For Mental Health

Public health has long recognized its role in, and the value of, facilitating partnerships to address health concerns. Mental health is an integral part of our overall health. However, the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health (1999) notes that:

A . . . about one in five Americans experience a mental disorder in the course of a year@ and A . . . nearly two-thirds of all people with diagnosable mental disorders do not seek treatment.@

Closer to home, suicide ranks as the second leading cause of death in Minnesota for people between the ages of 10 and 34 years of age. These statistics usually come as a shock to policymakers, community leaders, and the media and are an indication we are not doing everything we can to ensure good mental health for all of our citizens.

Minnesotans have shown leadership at the national, state and local levels with strong community-based advocacy, increased public education, and broad-based statewide partnerships focused on improving the mental health of individuals, families and communities. This book is the result of one of those partnerships, *Toward Better Mental Health in Minnesota: A Community Approach*.

In this partnership, the Minnesota Department of Health has joined with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services; Corrections; Children, Families and Learning; Employee Relations; Economic Security; and other state and local public, private and nonprofit agencies to host discussions with citizens regarding the mental health and well-being of communities. Community members are challenged to explore the connections between mental health, physical health and the physical and social environments in their communities. Community members are also asked to identify the strengths and needs of their respective communities and how they would like to enhance or change those factors that are linked with their mental health and well-being.

This book and the resulting work of these ongoing partnerships in Minnesota will clarify the critical need for a public health approach to mental health, one that involves individuals, families, communities and systems to strengthen the mental health of everyone. We encourage citizens of all ages to join in these statewide and community partnerships to inform policymaking and to enhance the capacities of communities and systems to promote the mental health and well-being of Minnesotans. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

Jan K. Malcolm
Commissioner of Health

Mental Health Is For Everyone

Mental health, physical health, and healthy social conditions (access to health care, violence-free families, respectful school environments, etc.) are all connected and necessary for people to be **at their best** to lead happy and productive lives.

This book is about *a public health approach* to mental health in Minnesota. Public health is:

A . . . what we, as a society, do collectively to assure conditions in which people can be healthy.
- *The Future of Public Health*,
Institute of Medicine, 1988

A public health approach looks at all people, whether that means the entire state of Minnesota, a particular community, or a group of people with something in common (age, state of health, certain needs, etc.). A public health approach also **focuses on prevention**. This means preventing illness or disability by providing information to everyone. Information, ideas and encouragement provided for people to practice healthy behaviors is called *health promotion*. This includes helping people learn about things in their own lives that may increase their chances of developing illness or disability and providing information on ways to avoid or decrease those **risks**.
Prevention also means providing information and/or services to people who have illness or disability, with the goals of improving their health, preventing illness from becoming more serious, or preventing related problems that could develop.

A public health approach also includes providing leadership to organize people, information and other resources in an effort to learn about and develop ways to address people's health-related needs. This leadership involves learning about what actions work best for the most people and providing services when no one else can or will.

The World Health Organization defines health as:

"...a state of complete well-being ... physical, social, and mental ... and not merely the absence of disease or illness."

Mental health can be defined as:

"a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity."

-Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health (1999)

The relationship between mental health, physical health, and social conditions is similar to that of the chicken and the egg. Which comes first? Good mental health? Good physical health? Or healthy social conditions? Just as with the chicken and the egg, it is sometimes hard to know. Family history and inherited illnesses can play a role in both our mental health and physical health. And physical and mental health are influenced by the environments in which we live. Mental health can be strengthened or weakened by our physical health, and vice versa. And the daily life choices people make may also influence mental and physical health as well as their social conditions. Because of these strong connections, the whole health of people and communities must be promoted.

One thing we do know: **Mental health is important for everyone.** And, just as people need food and exercise to be physically healthy, people also need certain things to be mentally healthy. Among these are:

- , loving, caring, and respectful relationships;
- , safe, supportive and responsive environments;
- , access to effective mental health care; and
- , a community that encourages individuals to seek help when they need it and to do what they need to do to be mentally healthy.

Mental Health Provides A Foundation For Health

Mental health provides an overall foundation for health from birth on. It is a cornerstone upon which:

- infants learn to explore their surroundings and respond to caring adults;
- children learn how to play, make friends, and become engaged learners at home and at school;
- youth become confident and competent in their growing independence;
- young adults make healthy and safe choices in a variety of environments;
- parents care for and support their children and each other;
- employees are productive and respectful in the workplace;
- older adults sustain satisfying relationships with their families and friends and remain active citizens in their communities; and
- children, youth and adults learn to take care of themselves through positive health behaviors such as eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep and exercise, and enjoying time with family and friends.

A Public Health Approach To Mental Health

In their *Healthy People 2010* report, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lists mental health as one of 10 leading health indicators. In Minnesota, mental health is one of 12 public health categories that communities are asked to consider when looking at and planning for the state of their community's health. As such, **mental health requires a public health prevention and health promotion approach just like other health concerns** including:

- immunizations against infectious disease;
- tobacco use;
- cancer;
- diabetes and other chronic disabling conditions.

Many public health programs not labeled **mental health** do, in fact, promote mental health. These include:

- pregnancy planning;
- prenatal care;
- parenting skills;
- infant, child, and adolescent growth and development;
- violence prevention;
- safety;
- systems development;
- disability prevention; and

- chemical health promotion.

The U.S. Surgeon General's recent reports on mental health and suicide prevention raise up public health's unique and critical role in mental health. This role includes providing leadership that promotes the mental health of entire communities. In mental health, as in other areas of health, this responsibility includes:

- ✓ measuring and monitoring the mental health of entire communities and those at risk for mental health disorders;
- ✓ identifying funding and other resources to address the mental health needs of individuals and communities, including planning programs;
- ✓ promoting universal access to mental health care;
- ✓ assuring that mental health policies and practices reflect the public's voice and serve the public's needs;
- ✓ bringing together a variety of community partners to deal with mental health concerns;
- ✓ enforcing laws and regulations that protect mental health and ensure safety;
- ✓ linking people to services that promote mental health;
- ✓ assuring a competent public health and personal health work force;
- ✓ mental health education to individuals, communities and professionals;
- ✓ evaluating effectiveness and accessibility of mental health services; and
- ✓ promoting mental health research.

Prevention And Mental Health

A public health approach to mental health involves working with individuals, with entire communities, and with a variety of systems (health, human services, schools, etc.) and **focuses on prevention and health promotion**. In the area of mental health, this means promotion of behaviors and activities to enhance overall health and well-being and prevention activities that benefit everyone. Public health plays a unique role in early intervention, often focusing efforts **upstream** to prevent mental health problems early on and to ensure the best possible likelihood for successful recovery from, or effectively living with, mental disorders.

A public health approach to mental health includes prevention activities that address a variety of behaviors in many different settings. Examples are:

- , screening and referral to mental health assessment services and other resources;
- , home visiting and other programs with parenting components for all families;
- , education on infant, child and youth growth and development;
- , assuring a variety of resources to meet the public's mental health needs;
- , public education regarding the signs and treatability of depression;
- , programs for students struggling with school attendance or alcohol abuse;
- , programs that assist the homebound elderly to take their mental health medications; and

, ensuring an effective and timely community response to people who are feeling suicidal.

What Is Mental Health Promotion?

There are times when people are more physically healthy than at other times, such as when someone has a cold or a fever or is receiving treatment for a serious disease such as cancer or diabetes. Similarly, there are times when people are more mentally healthy than at other times, such as when someone is grieving from the loss of a loved one or is receiving treatment for a mental disorder such as depression or schizophrenia.

In some cases, a person's mental health is not the best due to circumstances that are temporary (i.e. job loss) or part of life's transitions (i.e. death of a parent). In other cases, a person's mental health may be due in large part to heredity or an injury. In nearly all cases, a person's mental health, and one's ability to live with or recover from a mental illness, is linked with a variety of factors that may work to improve or impede one's capacity to enjoy mental health.

With its focus on individual, family, and community wellness, a public health approach promotes mental health across the life span and addresses a range of factors that can provide people with the best possible opportunity to enjoy good mental health. These factors include overall good health care, social and

coping skills (i.e. managing anger and stress), healthy behaviors, social support (nurturing and encouragement), and societal policies and attitudes. Thus, a public health approach can set the stage for people to take an active role in maintaining good mental health.

Examples of mental health promotion:

- Understanding the range of human behaviors across the life span allows for support of those who are healthy and assists in identifying those who may need assistance or mental health care.
- Maintaining good physical health may help one cope better with the loss of a loved one.
- Learning how to identify and reduce stress may prevent the onset of unmanageable emotions and violent behaviors.
- Caring for and encouraging the elderly to connect socially with friends may prevent their becoming depressed.
- A school environment that allows students to openly discuss mental health issues may encourage students to seek help when needed.

Mental health promotion also helps to confront unfair judgments and misunderstandings of people with mental health problems by seeing all people as holistic, regardless of their physical or mental health. Respect for human dignity and social justice are essential in promoting mental health for everyone.

Mental Health: A Component Of Minnesota's Public Health Goals

In Minnesota, many people working in local communities, public health, and health care worked together as partners to create public health goals for our state for the first years of the new century. Eighteen health goals and strategies were developed and are promoted in the publication, *Healthy Minnesotans: Public Health Improvement Goals 2004*. Two of those goals are devoted to **promoting, protecting, and improving mental health and suicide prevention**. In addition, there are a number of other mental health-related goals and strategies. These include:

- interpersonal violence prevention;
- adolescent health and youth development;
- parenting skills;
- children's health including early identification of children and youth with special health needs;
- prevention of alcohol and other chemical use;
- disabilities prevention;
- preventing loss of independence;
- prenatal care and breast feeding;
- women's health;
- unintended pregnancy;
- social conditions;

- improved access and health care coverage; and
- systems development to assure necessary services are available.

This broad range of goals reflects Minnesota’s commitment to mental health promotion efforts that address the continuum of mental health across the life span.

The Public Health System’s Role In Mental Health

The public health system’s commitment to mental health is reflected in the Minnesota Department Health’s priorities set forth in the following strategic directions:

- T** Eliminating health disparities;
- T** Bringing the community together on public health goals;
- T** Preparing Minnesota for health reform; and
- T** Holding ourselves and others accountable for results.

Mental health is one of 12 content categories of public health in the Community Health Services Planning Guide. Minnesota Community Health Boards, representing 87 counties, are encouraged to assess and plan for their communities’ mental health needs. The Minnesota Department of Health and the Community Health Boards work in partnership with a variety of professional groups and community organizations to strengthen the ability of the community to promote mental health and respond effectively to the community’s mental health needs.

Examples Of Public Health Mental Health Activities In Minnesota

- \$ Home visiting by public health nurses and other community-based service providers
- \$ Partnering with local collaboratives
- \$ Suicide prevention, Toward Better Mental Health, and other interagency mental health initiatives
- \$ Youth Risk Behavior initiatives, including the prevention of suicide, alcohol abuse, and violence
- \$ Youth development approaches to adolescent health
- \$ Chemical health programs
- \$ Sexual assault and other violence prevention activities
- \$ Minnesota Children with Special Health Needs clinics
- \$ Rural health & primary care activities that improve access to mental health care
- \$ Child and Teen Check-ups
- \$ Mental health service costs and quality studies
- \$ Mental health data collection and analysis
- \$ Provider compliance and assessment on defined best practices
- \$ Integrated, multi-component school health programs that incorporate mental health

Community Mental Health Indicators

Community members can learn about the mental health of their own communities by looking at the number and types of mental disorders of people in the community as well as the quality of life for people with mental disorders, as compared to everyone else. Another important measure of mental health in a community is to learn about the social and emotional well-being of community members. The indicators can be divided into two types: 1) indicators of social conditions; and 2) indicators of need, demand, supply and use of supports and services. Some counties, community-based agencies and schools may collect different kinds of information and/or some of this information may be available from state agencies. One way to begin collecting information is to gather and/or survey your community on what information is available. If there are gaps in sources of information, community members can encourage agencies to begin collecting and reporting the needed information.

Indicators of Social Conditions Affecting Mental Health

- **Employment**
- **School** attendance, mobility, and success
- **Safe housing**
- **Promotion of healthy infant, child, & youth development** in families, schools, community
- **Community norms** regarding, and youth access to, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- **Rates of mental disorders in the community** (health, human services, education, corrections)
- **Rates and appropriate use and effectiveness of correctional programs**
- **Social stress indicators** - homelessness, bias-motivated assaults, child maltreatment, domestic and intimate partner violence, maltreatment of vulnerable adults and the elderly, sexual violence, youth violence, alcohol-related crashes, adult admits to county detox, juvenile arrests for underage drinking, controlled substances arrests by age, other crime data
- **Indicators of social support** - emotionally-available parents, caregivers, and other adults; healthy child, youth, and family connections with communities and schools; environments and community norms that support physical activity, good nutrition, and self-care
- **Indicators of positive mental health** - ability to make positive changes in one's life and appreciate improvements; coping, conflict resolution, tolerance and other social skills; positive engagement in community, work, and school
- **Community awareness of mental health** - multi-media portrayals, media reports, public education
- **Degree of stigma** associated with mental and substance abuse disorders and seeking help
- **Poverty**

- **Indicators reflecting the subjective experience of the individual** – community’s perception of quality of life, Minnesota Student Survey
- **Indicators describing disability and morbidity** - health and human services data
- **Indicators of mortality** - death certificate, suicide data

- **Broad-based screening, brief interventions, and referrals** to appropriate and adequate treatment and follow-up care and monitoring of medications (i.e. number of mental health screening sites).

Indicators of Need, Demand, Supply and use of Mental Health Supports and Services

- **Availability of a range of treatment, advocacy and supportive services** for the community (i.e. ratio of formal and informal providers/per capita population);
- **Availability and ease of access** to culture-, age-, and disability-specific integrated mental health, substance abuse, primary, crisis care;
- **Effective coordination and integration of policy and effective practices** among schools, clinics, public health, faith communities, law enforcement, policy makers, families, social services, service organizations, and business;
- **Outreach** to elderly, homeless, and underserved populations;
- **Increased self-referral, self-reporting and formal and informal referrals and interventions**;
- **Community-, school-, and home-based wraparound services** and resources;
- **Support to those transitioning** in and out of mental health services, facilities, correctional programs and institutions;

A good understanding of a community’s mental health indicators can lead to planning, recommendations and action steps that can be promoted at many different levels of community life and public policymaking. This public health approach not only promotes mental health of entire communities but it ensures that the strategies reflect the public’s voice and serves the public’s need.



Mental Health Resources in Minnesota

Centre for Mental Health Solutions. 6950 France Avenue South, Edina, MN 55435, (612) 922-6916

Crisis Connection. Crisis Line: (612) 379-6363 (Twin Cities Metro Only), (612) 379-6377 (TTY); <http://www.crisis.org>

Irving B. Harris Training Center for Infant and Toddler Development, 51 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0345; (612) 624-4510; <http://icd.coled.umn.edu/HarrisCenter>

Light for Life Foundation of Minnesota. 1400 Madison Avenue, Suite 614, Mankato, MN 56001, (507) 387-5020

Mental Health Association of Minnesota. 2021 Hennepin Avenue East, Minneapolis, MN 55413, (612) 331-6840

Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Network. 1821 University Avenue West, St. Paul, MN 55104, (651) 637-2800

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health. 1821 University Avenue West, St. Paul, MN 55104, (651) 644-7333

Minnesota Children with Special Needs Program (MCSHN), Minnesota Department of Health, Division of Family Health, P.O. Box 64882, St. Paul, MN 55164-0882; (800) 728-5420

Minnesota Department of Health. (2000). *Report to the Minnesota Legislature: Suicide Prevention Plan.* Minnesota Department of Health, Division of Family Health, P.O. Box 64882, St. Paul, MN 55164-0882, <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opa/suicide.pdf>

Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Mental Health Practice. 121 East 7th Place, Suite 400, P.O. Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975, (651) 282-5621 & (800) 657-3957

Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children's Mental Health Division Collaboratives Contact. 444 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-3860, (651) 297-3174.

Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2000). *Toward Better Mental Health in Minnesota: A Community Approach, A Briefing Book for Citizens.* Minnesota Department of Human Services, 444 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-3872

SA\VE-Suicide Awareness\Voices of Education. 7317 Cahill Road, Suite 207, Minneapolis, MN 55439-0507, (952) 946-7998, (888) 511-SAVE, <http://www.save.org>

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Minnesota. 970 Raymond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55114, (651) 645-2948

U.S. Surgeon General's Reports on Mental Health, Children's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov>

For more information or additional copies of this book, contact:
Minnesota Department of Health, Division of Family Health, 651-281-9900.

If you require this document in another format, such as large print, Braille
or cassette tape, please call the Minnesota Department of Health:
651-215-5800 or 651-215-8980 (TDD).

Contact your local public health agency for more information. If you need the phone
number, please call the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-296-9401.