

# TURN AWARENESS INTO A CTION

**Action Guide** 

Oct. 16-17, 2025 | Washington, DC





At Mental Health America, we believe a Conference should do more than educate an individual, it should bring value to an entire team.

That's why we created the Mental Health America Conference Action Guide, a digital resource with clear, actionable steps designed to help attendees easily implement what they learned.

Feel free to share this guide with your colleagues or anyone who could benefit from learning how t Turn Awareness Into Action.





#### Meet Them Where They Are: How Youth Can Turn Personal Interests into Mental Health Change

By Deb Coffy, Travis Haughton, Asia Horne

Action 1: Identify young people in your organization or community and ask them about their existing interests (creative pursuits, sports, hobbies, cultural activities). Work with them to brainstorm how those interests could connect to mental health advocacy in your community.

Action 2: Audit your current youth engagement practices. Are you asking young people to fit into pre-existing structures, or are you creating pathways that build on what they already bring? Identify one area where you can shift from a deficit model to an asset-based approach.

Action 3: Create a "multiple pathways" resource map for your organization that shows young people at least five different ways to get involved in mental health advocacy beyond clinical or academic routes (examples: storytelling, peer support, athletics, community organizing, arts)





### Turning Data Into Action: How MHA's National Prevention and Screening Program Drives Change

By America Paredes and Shannah Mulvihill

Action 1: Visit the MHA State and County Screening Dashboard, mhanational.org/data-in-your-community, to explore what the data says about your community

Action 2: Check out the Mental Health Action Box on the MHA store, <u>store.mhanational.org</u>, an allin-one box that helps you activate screening in your community.

Action 3: Reach out and inquire about a screening partnership. Contact America Paredes at aparedes@mhanational.org to learn more.





### Workplace Wellness Strategies That Work for Leaders, Managers, and Employees

By Dr. Tracye Weeks, Shane Silver, Jean Edwards, and Lizzie Brennan

Action 1: Access free resources and best practices from Mental Health America for business leaders and employees at <a href="https://mhanational.org/workplace">https://mhanational.org/workplace</a>

Action 2: Read <u>Is your company on a path to wellness?</u> to learn best practices on the conditions that create a healthy workplace environment, as well as questions to help determine how your role in the organization can make a difference as a business leader, HR professional, people manager, or wellness champion

Action 3: Download <u>Workplace Mental Health in 2025</u> report to learn this year's trends and best practices of 360 organizations from 21+ industries and across 40 U.S. states and DC





### Empowering Youth Expression: A Youth-Led, Creative Arts Program for Mental Health

By Josephina Lin, Jennifer McKenzie, and Patrick Elvariste

Action 1: Attendees are encouraged to meaningfully engage and empower youth in community mental health programming.

Action 2: Attendees are empowered to adopt innovative strategies to integrate creative and cultural arts into youth mental health and wellness strategies.

Action 3: Attendees are invited to implement strengths-based approaches in creating programming for youth.





### Open Access to Mental Health Medication: Impact to State Medicaid Budgets

By Leigh Morrissey, Mike Schlossberg, Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey, and Heather Bagnall

Action 1: Engage with local MHA affiliate or other community-based organizations working on mental health access to understand their goals and action items around this issue.

Action 2: Dive into your state's Medicaid structure and resources to better understand what mental health medication access looks like in your state.

Action 3: Engage your legislative leadership (healthcare committee chairs, district representatives, department leadership) on this issue.





### Pause to Heal: A Public Education Program on Firearm Restraining Orders

By Allison Baum, Heather Whetsell, and Colleen Creighton

Action 1: Understand the firearm access laws in your state. If an Extreme Risk Law is an available tool, familiarize yourself with the specifics, particularly eligible petitioners and the role that mental health professionals can play in the process.

Action 2: Identify the state agencies and other community organizations playing a key role in extreme risk law implementation and education in your community and familiarize yourself with the work they are currently doing to raise awareness with the general public, as well as key subaudiences such as law enforcement.

Action 3: Connect with the Ad Council, Illinois Department of Public Health, and Brady teams to brainstorm opportunities to utilize Pause to Heal research and campaign materials in your community and share the program with state stakeholders to support efforts to raise awareness of these life-saving tools.





### The Rise of Pop Psychology: Navigating Misinformation in the Digital Mental Health Era

#### By Israa Nasir

Action 1: Critically assess and fact-check mental health content on social media before sharing or endorsing it.

Action 2: Practice media literacy by understanding how algorithms influence what mental health content is seen, and actively diversify sources of information.

Action 3: Encourage open conversations about mental health misinformation within personal and professional networks to raise awareness and promote critical thinking.





### Beyond Participation: Co-Creation as a Path to Meaningful Youth Mental Health Solutions

By Sidrah Durrani, Aliza Lopez, Mlumbeni Nkhoma, and Devin Moore

Action 1: Assess Current Engagement Strategies: Look at how you currently work with youth, evaluate whether engagement is meaningful or rooted in consultation. Identify opportunities for co-creation.

Action 2: Implement a Co-Creation Model: Implement a youth co-creation model by establishing advisory groups, co-designing solutions, or integrating youth into leadership roles.

Action 3: Develop A Framework for Sustainability: Develop an internal framework for sustained cocreation that ensures young people have ongoing, meaningful influence on mental health initiatives.





# Enhancing Community Well-being and Crisis Management for Neurodivergent Individuals: The Role of Neuroaffirming Language in Healthcare

By Carina E. Mendoza

Action 1: Promote Neuroaffirming Language Training for Healthcare Providers

Action 2: Develop Accessible and Neuroaffirming Communication Materials

Action 3: Establish systems within healthcare settings that allow Neurodivergent individuals to express their preferred language and communication needs at the beginning of session/appointment





#### Partnering with School Nurses to Support Student Mental Health

By Lisa Hunter Romanelli, Joanna Pitts, and Leah Rowland

Action 1: Ask a school nurse in your community what resources s/he has to support students with mental health need.

Action 2: Share the Action Signs for Youth Mental Health with school nurses and other school-based professionals.

Action 3: Share the School Nurses Mental Health
Toolkit with school nurses in your community: The
toolkit can be downloaded for free: SchoolNurses-Mental-HealthToolkit\_24DigitalEdition.pdf.





### Rural Mental Health: Unmet Needs and Opportunities for Prescription Digital Therapeutics

#### By Lisa Palko and Chuck Strand

Action 1: Engage physician associations and mental health patient advocates – particularly those connected to rural communities – to identify unmet needs that PDTs could address, discuss current usage, collaborate with PDT developers, and advocate for comprehensive coverage.

Action 2: Reach out to industry groups and digital health organizations, like the Society for Digital Mental Health (SDMH) or Digital Medicine (DiMe) Society, to learn how new billing codes specific to PDTs can be leveraged to streamline reimbursement and facilitate integration into current practice.

Action 3: Educate patients, especially in rural communities, on how PDTs work and whether any are available or being developed for their condition. This might include developing educational materials on PDTs for rural clinics. It will be critical to also communicate how high standards for safety and efficacy distinguish PDTs from other digital health apps, given the importance of these product features to survey respondents.



#### Escucha Tus Emociones: Un Enfoque Comunitario para Aumentar el Acceso a la Sanación Emocional en las Comunidades Latinas

Por Cecilia E. Tenorio y Patricia Luevano Mayorga

Paso 1: Identificar las barreras culturales y lingüísticas existentes en su comunidad que impiden el acceso a servicios/apoyos de salud mental.

Paso 2: Explorar qué organizaciones comunitarias, colaboradores o personas con una relación de confianza con la comunidad a la que se dirige pueden apoyar su proyecto o iniciativa y contribuir a la mejora de los resultados en salud mental.

Paso 3: Revisar los videos de Escucha Tus Emociones (disponibles públicamente en YouTube) y generar ideas sobre cuatro temas/títulos de videos que puedan ayudar a reducir las barreras de acceso o a satisfacer las necesidades de sanación emocional identificadas en su comunidad.





#### Moms Are Dying: Confronting the Maternal Mental Health Crisis Through Policy & Advocacy

#### By Sogand Ghassemi

Action 1: Assess & Report Local Gaps and Impact: Download the Maternal Mental Health Report Card for your state, identify where your state is falling short, outline the impact of your state's maternal morbidity and mortality, and share these findings with your state ACOG, medical, or psychiatric society.

Action 2: Engage Policymakers & Health Plans: Set up a meeting with a state legislator, health plan representative, or policymaker in the next 3 months. Identify legislators who may be strong champions and build relationships with them early.

Action 3: Build or Join a Coalition to Drive Policy Change: Convene listening sessions with community stakeholders to identify shared priorities and elevate diverse voices and connect with an existing advocacy group working on maternal mental health. If none exist, use these listening sessions to lay the groundwork for a new coalition.





#### Putting Teens in the Driver's Seat: Empowering Young People for Sustainable Change at the Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels

By G Wei Ng, Laura Beth Levitt, and Jasmin I.
Goodwin

Action 1: Recognize the benefits of youth-led interventions (i.e. more relatable, trustworthy, and contextually relevant/acceptable) and prioritize youth-led, peer-to-peer programming as a part of your mental health promotion/prevention plan.

Action 2: Engage with youth from your respective settings to co-pilot the design of mental health promotion and prevention solutions.

Action 3: Leverage the power of peer influence and empower positive peer interactions in the delivery of youth-led interventions.



### Strengthening Mental Health Systems Through Prevention and Community Support

#### By Cara McNulty

Action 1: Expand Community-Based Prevention and Support: Invest in early intervention programs, peer networks, and preventative services while equipping community organizations and behavioral health providers with the training and resources needed to deliver consistent, wraparound support.

Action 2: Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration: Build stronger partnerships between government, nonprofits, healthcare providers, and community leaders by creating coordinated systems, cross-sector working groups, and feedback channels that ensure care is timely, sustainable, and informed by lived experience.

Action 3: Align Programs for Long-Term Impact: Advocate for streamlined programs that removes barriers, integrates crisis response with ongoing care and social services, and directs resources toward addressing the root causes of mental health challenges.





### Aligning for Action: A Strategic Path to Collective Progress

By Nancy R Euteneuer and Charitie Herbst

Action 1: Facilitate Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement:
Attendees can initiate a stakeholder mapping process in their own regions to identify key partners from diverse sectors, ensuring that all voices—including those with lived mental health experience—are included in the planning and decision-making process.

Action 2: Develop a Collaborative Strategic Plan: Using the insights from the session, attendees can work with their local communities to create a regional mental health strategic plan, aligning resources and efforts around shared objectives that address gaps and barriers in service delivery.

Action 3: Establish a Neutral Facilitator Role: Attendees can explore the possibility of creating a neutral, dedicated position within their region—similar to the Regional Mental Health Coordinator role—whose focus is to oversee the implementation of the plan, maintain accountability among partners, and address ongoing challenges in mental health care.





#### Empowering Aging: Older Adult Peer-Based Mental Health Models to Enhance Care and Quality of Life

By Kim Williams and Bill Meehan

Action 1: Identify opportunities to embed older adult peer-based mental health support programming in your organization and/or community.

Action 2: Determine model of programming best suited to meet the needs of the older adult population/community being served.

Action 3: Develop a plan, including potential partnerships and funding streams, for implementing program model within your organization/community.





### The Selfie Generation - Exploring Self Diagnosis and Social Media Among Gen Z

By Esther Fernandez, Courtney M. Tracy, and Ulma R. Chatterjee

Action 1: Curate your feed to promote credible sources and healthy coping skills.

Action 2: Call out misleading or harmful mental health content online.

Action 3: Find trustworthy mental health organizations (locally or online) that provide guidance when looking for research, education, and health care in your area.





### Trust in 988: A Look at American Adults' Trust in Crisis Systems of Care

By Madhuri Jha, Christopher W. Drapeau, and Johnell Lawrence

Action 1: Leverage the data shared on trust and awareness to create other data strategies that are relevant to your regional location to increase localized trust and awareness in crisis response

Action 2: Employ recommendations derived from this study to actualize effective crisis responses

Action 3: Use these results to identify policy and advocacy strategies to ensure there is legislative buy in to continue investing in crisis response.





### Bridging the Gap: Community-Based Mental Health Models for Crisis Intervention and Access

#### By Riquelmy N. Lamour

Action 1: Establish or strengthen cross-sector partnerships by connecting with local primary care providers, behavioral health specialists, and social service organizations to develop a coordinated, trauma-informed response to community mental health needs.

Action 2: Plan or join a public-facing mental health event in your community where PHQ-9, GAD-7, and Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) screenings can be conducted. Use this opportunity to reduce stigma, offer psychoeducation, and link participants to immediate and ongoing care.

Action 3: Design a culturally responsive outreach strategy that leverages peer ambassadors, trusted messengers, or mobile teams to meet individuals where they are—at churches, schools, community centers, or even on the street—to expand access and normalize mental health support.





# Connected Care: How Al and Digital Innovations Are Transforming Mental Health Support for Families and Communities

By Kibby McMahon

Action 1: Identify the unique challenges that family members, caregivers, and loved ones experience caring for individuals with mental health challenges.

Action 2: Experiment with digital tools that support relational health to get first-hand experience with the opportunities and limitations.

Action 3: Contribute to partnerships among local organizations, support groups, or tech innovators to pilot or expand access to technology-driven mental health resources.





# Turning Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) Recommendations Into Action: Preventing Overdoses with Non-Traditional Partners

By Emily A. Godfrey and Nava Bastola

Action 1: Share the "Guide to Reducing Overdoses with Non-Traditional Partners" and discuss what engaging non-traditional partners would look like in your community.

Action 2: Develop a targeted outreach plan to engage at least one identified non-traditional partner, utilizing inperson meetings, personalized emails, or mailed information packets.

Action 3: If initial outreach to a non-traditional partner is successful, assist them in obtaining naloxone and utilize the guide to identify and secure free naloxone training. If the initial outreach is unsuccessful, formulate a plan to either contact a different non-traditional partner or develop a follow-up strategy for the original contact.





### Youth-Driven Mental Health Policymaking for System Transformation

By Abhinav Anne, Sai Ganbote, and Michael J. Stiehl

Action 1: Identify partners with lived experience and strategies to engage these groups in collaborative policy-making.

Action 2: Identify barriers to accessing behavioral health care that can be overcome through collective action.

Action 3: Identify strategies to be deployed for short-, medium-, and long-term system change.