



# EMPOWERED

Colorado LGBTQ+ Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Initiative

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Originally Mental Health Week at its launch, Mental Health Awareness Month has been recognized since 1949 with the goal of educating Americans about mental illness and mental health. Much like the name and time dedicated to it has changed, the focus of Mental Health Month has transformed over the years to meet the growing demand to prioritize mental health. This year, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has chosen the message **'You Are Not Alone'**, a common theme during this pandemic where many have felt isolated and unsure where to turn for help. Workers in the behavioral health space across the nation are bracing themselves for a **predicted mental health crisis** following the stress of this past year. Since the beginning of lockdown, the average number of calls per month to Colorado Crisis Services has increased by 32 percent.

One of the biggest goals of Mental Health Awareness Month is reducing stigma by increasing

education and overall awareness around mental health. **One in five** U.S. adults experience mental illness each year, but less than half get treated. For LGBTQ+ folks, it's closer to three in five adults. Millions of people in the U.S. are impacted by mental illness and yet so many, either through fear, shame, or inability to access mental health services, don't receive treatment. Reducing the barriers surrounding having a mental health or substance misuse condition will make it easier for those who are struggling to reach out.



**While discussing Envision:You's statewide public awareness campaign How to Have the Talk**, Steven Haden, Envision:You CEO and co-founder, said that, "Talking

about mental health helps improve our community by making it more acceptable for those experiencing mental illnesses to seek help, learn to cope, and get on the road to recovery. In addition, mental health is not just about mental illness. It is also about maintaining a positive state of well-being. As the stressors of the pandemic are impacting people's mental health, it is important to

## 5 HEALTHY TIPS

...for talking to a loved one you suspect may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

- 1 **Make sure** you are in the right headspace to support them through what might be a difficult conversation.
- 2 **Avoid being judgemental.** Don't use language like 'weird' or 'crazy'
- 3 **Take them seriously.** Try not to minimize what they are going through by saying things like 'It's just a bad day.'
- 4 **Be direct and ask** if you think they are in danger of hurting themselves or others.
- 5 **Make yourself available** to talk again if needed. Check-in afterwards and consider having another conversation about professional resources that may be available.

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## ADVOCATE ROBERT WERTHWEIN

Robert Werthwein (he/him) is the director of the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), which



funds behavioral health services for underserved Coloradans and regulates the state's public behavioral health system. "At OBH, we are working hard to make care more responsive and accessible for all Coloradans," says Werthwein. OBH is retooling their marketing campaigns to be more inclusive of queer communities, partnering with community organizations to raise awareness of state services and boosting mental health interventions for youth - a key support for LGBTQ+ youth - to make them more accessible.

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## MENTAL HEALTH *continued*

provide safe spaces to talk about mental health and offer support."

If you'd like to get involved in Mental Health Awareness activities, you can download media fact sheets, graphics, and other media kits from **NAMI** and **Mental Health America** to help spread the word. You can also help by sharing your story. Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools to show others that they are not alone in their behavioral health challenges and encourage them to seek help. **How to Have the Talk** is one



Envision:You program that is designed to give people the tools to notice when people in their life are struggling and the confidence to reach out and support them.

If you or a loved one is struggling, know that you are not alone. Call **Colorado Crisis Services** at **1-844-493-8255** or text **Talk** to **38255** for support.



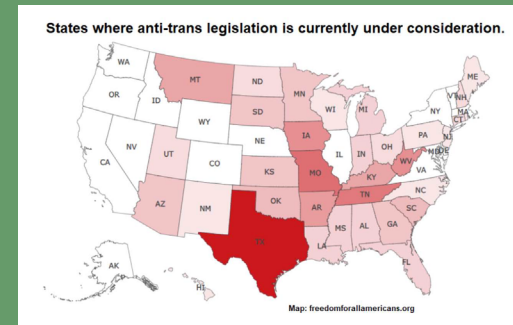
## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT QUEERING MENTAL HEALTH - SAVE THE DATE!

In May Envision:You is teaming up with OUT FRONT Magazine to produce the Queering Mental Health insert being placed in the May issue focusing on mental health. This insert will bring attention to the disparities in behavioral healthcare for the LGBTQ+ community and reduce stigma surrounding mental health topics. Pick up a free copy on May 7 at your **nearest distribution site**.



## FRESH PRESS

On April 6, the Arkansas House and Senate voted to ban gender-affirming care for transgender minors. The bill **HB 1570, now officially Act 626**, bans doctors from giving certain treatments to those under 18, including puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or gender-affirming surgery. Arkansas lawmakers chose to vote this way despite opposing advice from doctors and other medical experts, including major medical organizations like the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, that actively opposed the bill. This is not the first bill targeting transgender people that has advanced in Arkansas and other states this year.



**Sixty anti-trans bills from 31 states are being considered in 2021.** Anti-trans legislation will cost transgender and gender non-conforming folks' lives, whether through increased stigma or the impact of denying identity-affirming care will have on mental health. If you or a loved one needs support, call The Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386, or find more resources for trans folks at <http://translifeline.org/>. **LEARN MORE**

## COMMUNITY PARTNER

We would like to highlight Mental Health Colorado this month, a nonprofit that aims to make the behavioral healthcare system more responsive to the needs of everyone in the community by engaging with policymakers and advocating for



**MENTAL HEALTH  
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change. Get involved in supporting their work by **joining the Brain Wave**, a statewide network of mental health advocates that help shape public policy and public opinion by sharing their lived experience. Your voice matters!

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