

CONGREGATIONAL TOOLKIT

Our Congregational Toolkit provides information, tools and resources that will enable you to offer depression awareness programming in your congregation and community. This toolkit will help guide you while considering the types of programming and help you choose the most suitable method(s) of disseminating information to your congregation or community. Before planning an event or activity, keep in mind the following:

- What are you trying to achieve? (e.g., increase awareness of depression symptoms)
- Who is your targeted audience? (e.g., youth and their families)
- When and where will your activity be held? (e.g., immediately after service in the social hall)
- Should you partner with other organizations? (e.g., National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [AFSP])
- How will you promote your event? (e.g., bulletin announcement, social media)
- How will you measure success? (e.g., survey, follow-up session)

Suggestions for Congregational Programming

When organizing your event, keep in mind that the two key messages of your depression awareness program should be: 1) Depression should be viewed as a medical condition, just like hypertension or diabetes. 2) There are effective treatments for depression. Below are some suggestions for congregational programming, and feel free to come up with other ideas — you know your congregation/community best.

- Provide educational materials about depression during worship services and other congregational gatherings.

- Raise your congregation's awareness of depression by placing information on the symptoms, prevalence and treatment of depression in congregational bulletins and mailings. Special attention should be given to the effectiveness of treatments for depression.
- Publish the telephone number of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255), and information about other phone numbers to call and places to visit for people who are in distress and need immediate.
- Help people recognize what depression looks like and understand the tremendous impact it can have.
- Provide encouragement and guidance about where to turn for help if someone thinks a loved one might be depressed.
 - Treatment options
 - Local resources
 - When to consult with a family physician or a mental health professional
- Organize special programs on depression following worship services or as part of other congregational gatherings.
 - Provide educational materials that are more extensive.
 - Recruit speakers to discuss important perspectives on depression.
 - Respected leaders of your congregation who can emphasize that depression is a common disorder that does not reflect weakness or moral failure
 - Representatives from organizations that advocate on behalf of those with depression and other mental health conditions (e.g., NAMI, Mental Health America)
 - Mental health professionals who can speak about diagnosis and treatment

- People who have had depression and are willing to share their personal experiences (e.g., presentations by In Our Own Voice, a program offered by many NAMI affiliates)
- Offer discussion sessions, or connect people to groups in the community, so that stories about depression's direct and indirect impact can be shared and so people can talk with others who are facing similar challenges.

When facilitating a discussion session, it is important to create a safe environment where each participant feels comfortable sharing their experience and where people will respect the views of others. Group participants should be reminded to be respectful and empathetic, and to maintain complete confidentiality. Everything shared in the group should stay in the group. It is also important to establish ground rules so that everyone has the opportunity to participate. Allow participants to “pass” if they don't feel up to sharing. If it appears that someone is in a crisis, encourage the person to call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention-lifeline) at 800-273-TALK (8255). If they are in immediate danger, call 911.

When to Plan a Congregational Event

National Health Observances (NHOs) are special days, weeks or months dedicated to raising awareness about important health topics. They are effective ways to provide information about health conditions and to support one another. Educational events held at these times can help create positivity and empowerment for people with health conditions and their loved ones. The following are examples of the NHOs and awareness months that are the most suitable for congregational depression awareness programs.

May: Mental Health Awareness Month

This observance was established in 1949 to raise awareness of trauma and the impact it can have on the physical, emotional and mental well-being of children, families and

communities. The importance of mental health and wellness in Americans' lives is also recognized, and recovery from mental illness is celebrated.

Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is May 7. It is also a day to show that positive mental health is essential for a child's development. For more information, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at samhsa.gov/childrens-awareness-day or the American Psychological Association (APA) at apa.org/pi/families/children-awareness-day.

For more information on Mental Health Awareness Month, visit the NAMI website at nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Health-Awareness-Month or Mental Health America at mhanational.org/mental-health-month.

June: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month

This observance helps raise awareness about the many treatment options and how they can help people with PTSD have a better quality of life. For more information, visit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at ptsd.va.gov/understand/awareness/index.asp.

July: Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month

Formally recognized in 2008 as BIPOC Mental Health Month, this observance promotes awareness of the unique struggles that underrepresented groups in the United States face regarding mental illness. Bebe Moore Campbell was an American author, journalist, teacher and mental health advocate who worked tirelessly to shed light on the mental health needs of Blacks and other communities. For more information, visit mhanational.org/BIPOC-mental-health-month.

September: National Suicide Prevention Month

In September, mental health advocates, suicide prevention organizations, suicide survivors, allies and community members unite to promote awareness.

- On **World Suicide Prevention Day**, Sept. 10, those affected by suicide are remembered and awareness is raised to focus efforts on directing treatment to people who need it most.
- **National Suicide Prevention Week**, which includes World Suicide Prevention Day, is a time to share resources and stories, as well as to promote suicide prevention awareness.

To obtain resources and materials to raise awareness of suicide prevention, visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org/promote-national-suicide-prevention-month/.

October: National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month

This observance creates awareness of depression and the need for accessible and affordable mental health screenings.

- **Mental Health Awareness Week.** Started in 1990 by the United States Congress, this observance during the first week of October spreads awareness and education about mental illness.
- **National Depression Screening Day** is a community initiative to support behavioral health screenings, help teach about signs of depression and connect those in need with nearby resources. The screenings, which are educational and not diagnostic, help people determine if they are exhibiting symptoms associated with depression or other behavioral health conditions and if they should seek help. To access a free, anonymous and confidential depression screening, visit mhanational.org/national-depression-screening-day.
- **National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Recovery and Understanding** is Oct. 5. Mental illness networks and faith leaders are urged to work together to prepare and to recognize this day in a way that

works best for each faith community. The prayers and actions of both faith communities and secular organizations (e.g., NAMI and the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance) can support mental health in America.

Through spiritual guidance, many individuals and communities find healing and recovery. For examples of activities, prayers and invocations that can offer hope for people touched by mental illness, visit stage.nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet/Inspirational-and-Healing-Prayers/National-Day-of-Prayer-for-Mental-Illness-Recovery.

- **World Mental Health Day**, Oct. 10, has been recognized since 1992 in over 150 countries worldwide to educate, advocate against stigma, and promote awareness of mental health education and other resources that are available in communities. For more information and to access material, visit who.int/campaigns/world-mental-health-day/2021.

Side note: As you plan congregational programs, please be aware that some people affected by depression may not feel comfortable attending a program focused exclusively on depression. To recognize and respect their wishes while also providing them information, it is recommended that the program be a part of a regularly scheduled group meeting or activity that people attend regardless of the topic. Another option is to focus the program more broadly, perhaps covering stress as well as depression. Be sure to create a welcoming, supportive, safe and nonjudgmental environment by taking the following steps:

- Let people know it's OK to talk about mental health.
- Discuss mental health with an approach that supports prevention, treatment and recovery.
- Encourage people experiencing mental health disorders, and their families, to seek help, and assist them when needed in finding the help.
- Promote positive mental health through fellowship.

- Foster opportunities to build connections with individuals and families dealing with mental health disorders through a spirit of trust and acceptance.

Helpful Tips for Successful Event Planning

- Determine the topic and format of the event based on your target audience.
 - Potential topics:
 - Recognizing the signs and symptoms of depression
 - Understanding treatments for depression
 - Recognizing and responding to suicide warning signs
 - Depression in the elderly
 - Depression in children/adolescents
 - Supporting people who are directly and indirectly affected by depression
 - Virtual or in-person
 - Presentation/class
- Schedule the date, time and location.
 - Allow a minimum of six weeks for planning.
 - Consider physical space, parking, accessibility.
- Establish your event's goal(s) so you have a clear vision of what success looks like using SMART objectives.
 - S – Specific: The outcome, and by when (e.g., organize two depression awareness events by Oct. 31, 2022)
 - M – Measureable: How much? (e.g., reach 100 congregants at each event)
 - A – Achievable: (you're confident the objective can be reached)
 - R – Relevant: (e.g., does the event relate to the goal of the Congregational Depression Awareness Program [CDAP] and the ministry?)
 - T – Time-bound: (i.e., create a timeline)
- Set a budget.

- The budget determines the scope of your event.
- Have a firm idea of the spending limit and let it guide your decisions.
- Consider creating a yearly planning budget to allocate the appropriate amount of funds for each event.
- Potential event costs:
 - Refreshments
 - Photocopies
 - Postage/mail service
 - Giveaways (e.g., books, magnets, pens)
 - Speaker stipends
- Identify partnering organizations (e.g., NAMI, a local mental health agency, a faith-based organization in your community).
- Recruit volunteers to help with planning the event, setting up, cleanup, and follow-up after the event.
- Promote the event (communicating through your networks is effective because it comes from a trusted source).
 - Bulletin inserts
 - Announcements
 - Email list/newsletter
 - Posters/flyers
 - Online tools (choose the online platform based on your target audience)
 - Eventbrite: This fast growing integrated system for marketing events offers a one-stop shop for invitations and RSVPs, and generates promotions for Facebook, websites and e-news. This service is free if there is no fee to attend the event. Visit eventbrite.com.
 - SurveyMonkey: This cloud-based survey tool helps you create, send and analyze surveys. You can email surveys post them on websites.

The basic tools are free, and more advanced features and resources are available with paid plans. Visit [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com).

- Facebook: This is a great way to promote the event with existing relationships.
- Organization's website: Place the event on the calendar/upcoming events page, and feature it on the homepage.
 - Consider tracking registration to plan for audience size and for follow-ups.
- Show appreciation by thanking leadership, volunteers, partnering organizations, speaker(s), etc.
- Evaluate the event.
 - What went well?
 - What could be improved?
 - If possible, get feedback from attendees.
- Report to the CDAP program coordinator.
 - Send your contact information, event date, topic, speaker(s), number of attendees and costs.
 - Share feedback about the event (e.g., participants found the handouts very helpful, parking was an issue).

Side note: Event planning and coordination can be very stressful. It requires juggling many tasks and performing roles such as accountant, venue inspector, catering supervisor and public relations manager. All of this can be very daunting.  Below are some ways you can relieve event planning stress and become more efficient.

- Use checklists to be organized.
- Manage your time wisely (schedule and prioritize your tasks).
- Delegate essential tasks to others, and trust them to follow through while you manage other responsibilities.

- Understand that you are human (recognize your limits and that you don't need to be perfect all of the time).
- Prepare for everything, such as emergencies, and have contingency plans.
- Celebrate the small wins, mark important milestones and record your progress.

Evaluations

Evaluations are critical components of an event. They can tell you if an event was successful according to your goals and can help you decide whether to hold the same event again, make some tweaks or turn your focus to a more effective initiative.

Using your SMART goals, you have a foundation to create questions to evaluate your event. A participant survey is a common and effective way to gather feedback. Be sure to make an evaluation short. While you want to obtain useful information, you don't want to discourage people from completing the evaluation because it has too many questions. A good rule of thumb is no more than 10 questions.

Example survey questions:

Qualitative (requires comments)

- Why did you attend our event?
- Did the event meet your expectations? Why or why not?
- What did you find most useful about the event?
- What did you like the least about the event?
- Are you likely to participate in one of our future events? Why or why not?
- Do you have suggestions for future events?

Rating scale questions (use a scale ranging from "extremely likely" to "not at all likely")

- How do you rate the speaker's knowledge? (Ask this question for each speaker.)
- How likely are you to recommend this event to a family member or friend?
- How likely are you to attend one of our events again?

- How do you rate the event's value?
- How beneficial was the information presented at the event?

The best time to collect feedback is when it is fresh in the attendees' minds. It is highly recommended to allot time during the event for attendees to provide feedback about their overall experience. Evaluations can be completed using an event app, an online survey or a hard copy.

When holding an in-person event, it is helpful to offer an incentive to encourage participants to complete the evaluation. For example, completed evaluations can be entered in a raffle for a prize, or gift cards can be offered for completing online event surveys.

Local and National Resources

Many organizations and agencies that have materials and other resources that can be used in congregational programs addressing depression and other mental health conditions.

Need immediate help in an emergency?

If you or a loved one is in immediate danger, calling 911 may be necessary. It is important to notify the operator that it is a psychiatric emergency and to ask for police officers trained in crisis intervention or trained to assist people experiencing a psychiatric emergency.

Need immediate help in a crisis?

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

800-273-TALK (8255), press 1 for veterans

A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week

- **Crisis Text Line**

crisistextline.org

Text “HOME” to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor and receive free, 24/7 crisis support via text message.

- **The Trevor Project**

thetrevorproject.org

Call 866-488-7386 or text “START” to 678678 to reach this national 24-hour, toll-free confidential suicide hotline for LGBTQ youth.

Additional Resources

- **Pro Bono Counseling Project WARMLine**

If you’re feeling anxious or depressed, or if you just need to talk to someone, call 410-598-0234 or 443-608-9182, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time.

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

nami.org

NAMI is an alliance of more than 600 local affiliates and 48 state organizations that work in communities to raise awareness and provide support and education. NAMI offers several programs that can help individuals and families impacted by depression and other mental health conditions, such as NAMI Family-to-Family, NAMI Peer-to-Peer, NAMI Connection and NAMI in Our Own Voice.

- **NAMI Maryland**

namimd.org

NAMI Maryland provides educational resources and events, statewide outreach, advocacy and affiliate organizational support. Free trainings are available for affiliates to help them deliver NAMI programs. For more information, call 410-884-8691.

- **NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore**

namibaltimore.org/

This organization works with dedicated grass-roots leaders to raise awareness and provide essential education, advocacy and support group programs for people living with mental illness and for their loved ones. For answers to questions about programs and resources, call 410-435-2600 or e-mail info@namibaltimore.org.

- **NAMI HelpLine**

This free, nationwide peer-support service provides information, resource referrals and support for people living with a mental health condition and for their family members and caregivers. Call 800-950-NAMI (6264), Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time.

- **Mental Health America (MHA)**

mhanational.org

A nationwide community-based nonprofit, MHA is dedicated to addressing the needs of people living with mental illness and promoting the overall mental health of Americans. With more than 200 local affiliates in 42 states, MHA offers a variety of materials, online tools, programs and events.

- **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

dbsalliance.org

This national organization focusing on mood disorders offers online and printed resources and has more than 200 affiliate chapters with peer-run support groups. The website provides a variety of educational material including podcasts, videos and brochures on depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety.

- **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

nimh.nih.gov

The NIMH is the lead federal agency for research on mental disorders. It offers brochures and fact sheets on topics including depression in men, women, older adults and teens.

- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

afsp.org

Established in 1987, the AFSP is a voluntary health organization that provides those affected by suicide with a nationwide community empowered by research, education and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death. AFSP is dedicated to saving lives and offering hope.

- **MedlinePlus**

medlineplus.gov

MedlinePlus is a service of the world's largest medical library, the National Library of Medicine, which is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). An online health information resource, MedLinePlus provides easy-to-read information on numerous health topics, drugs and supplements, medical tests and genetics. You can also download recipes for a healthy lifestyle.

- **American Psychiatric Association**

psychiatry.org

The American Psychiatric Association is the primary professional organization of psychiatrists in the United States. Its website provides information for patients and families on common mental health disorders, including about symptoms, risk factors and treatment options. You can also read stories from people living with mental illness and access links to other resources. The website includes a psychiatrist locator that can be used to search for a psychiatrist in your area.

- **American Psychological Association**

apa.org

The American Psychological Association is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students in the United States. The organization's website offers helpful information for patients and families on a variety of behavioral health topics such as addictions, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

- **Mental Health First Aid**

mentalhealthfirstaid.org

This eight-hour national certification course teaches laypeople how to assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use related crisis. You will learn risk factors and warning signs regarding mental health and addiction, strategies for helping someone in both crisis and noncrisis situations, and where to turn to for help.

Infographics and Fact Sheets for Congregational Programs

The following publications from the National Institute of Mental Health are free to download, print, and distribute to your congregation or community. You may also order a free hard copy on each publication's website.

- *My Mental Health: Do I Need Help?* [nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/my-mental-health-do-i-need-help](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/my-mental-health-do-i-need-help)
- *5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain*
[nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-for-helping-someone-in-emotional-pain](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-for-helping-someone-in-emotional-pain)
- *Taking Control of Your Mental Health: Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Provider*
[nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/tips-for-talking-with-your-health-care-provider](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/tips-for-talking-with-your-health-care-provider)
- *Warning Signs of Suicide*
[nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide)

The following infographics and fact sheets from the National Alliance on Mental Illness provide information on the prevalence and impact of mental illness. They can be downloaded and printed for free at [nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/Infographics-Fact-Sheets](https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/Infographics-Fact-Sheets).

- *Mental Health Care Matters*
- *You Are Not Alone*
- *It's Okay to Talk About Suicide*
- *The Ripple Effect of Mental Illness*
- *Common Warning Signs of Mental Illness*