



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: October 11, 2018

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Reducing Mental Health Stigma is Priority for Putnam

Brewster, NY— When Putnam County residents were asked about the most important health priorities, mental health was a top concern—specifically reducing depression, anxiety and stress. These local concerns are reflective of the current health trends. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. To encourage those at risk to seek treatment, reducing stigma is the first step. Mental health advocates locally and nationally are increasing awareness of the stigma that surrounds mental illness. The designation of Mental Illness Awareness Week, the first week of October, aims to support advocacy initiatives that fight stigma surrounding mental illness, educate the public and provide support to Americans faced with the realities of living with a mental health condition.

MaryEllen Odell, Putnam County Executive, urges all residents of Putnam County to get involved. “Mental illness is more common than most people think. Someone you know may not seek healthcare because they are concerned about what people think,” County Executive Odell says. “The responsibility of reducing stigma falls on our entire community— we must come together and raise awareness about mental illness.”

One in five adults in the U.S. experiences a mental illness in any given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Yet nearly 50% of youth aged 8-15 and almost 60% of adults with a mental illness didn't receive mental health services in the previous year. The shame, fear and silence that stem from the stigma surrounding mental illness often prevent people from seeking treatment. “When you realize that those facing mental illness may be too ashamed to ask for help, then we must take a step back to see the bigger picture. As with any other disease, education and prompt, quality treatment are key

components in reducing death. And it all begins with communication,” says interim Commissioner of Health Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD, from the Putnam County Department of Health.

Megan Castellano, executive director of The Mental Health Association in Putnam County says, “Mental health is a public health issue, an important conversation that we all need to have about connecting people in need to support. When you empower people with facts, information and resources, they can make decisions about the treatment options that are best for them and then they can begin, or continue, their recovery journey. Most importantly, to let them know that they are not alone and that recovery is possible.”

This year, NAMI’s awareness week campaign aims to encourage people to speak up about mental illness. “Mental illness does not discriminate. We must remember that just like asthma, diabetes or any other chronic disease, mental illness cannot be cured by simply wishing it away. By bringing to light the existing stigma against those facing mental illness, the #CureStigma campaign invites people to replace their judgments and insensitivities with compassion and awareness so that those who need help feel free to get it,” says Ed Murphy from NAMI’s Putnam County chapter.

One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14 and while diagnosing mental illness in children can be complicated, pediatricians encourage parents to address mental health concerns as soon as they arise. “Speaking up on behalf of people impacted by mental illness may not be easy, but by sharing stories we have the power to spread hope and inspire others to cure stigma,” adds Ed Murphy. By using the hashtag #CureStigma and promoting an online assessment tool, NAMI is encouraging more empathetic dialogue about mental health conditions.

For resources on mental health services in Putnam County visit The Mental Health Association at <http://www.mhaputnam.org> or NAMI at <https://namiputnam.org/>. To learn more about #CureStigma visit <https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Illness-Awareness-Week>. If you are someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or is in need of immediate mental health support, contact the Putnam County Mental Illness Crisis hotline at 845-225-1222.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public

Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at www.putnamcountyny.com; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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