

# FOREWORD

In 2015, we tied Mental Health America's longest-standing signature national initiative – Mental Health Month – to our newest one, B4Stage4. This year, we build on that theme.

When we started Mental Health Month back in 1949, we did so to raise awareness about mental health and the crises that occur when we fail to address mental health concerns early and effectively. Millions of veterans had recently returned from war, our baby boom had just begun, and we were seeing the enormous toll mental illnesses took on individuals and the people who loved them.

Mental Health Month made an impact. Today, thousands of organizations throughout the nation and the world embrace it.

When we added B4Stage4 thinking to Mental Health Month in 2015, our reach grew dramatically. More than 5,500 entities downloaded our tool kits, and our materials were seen and used by 19 million people. B4Stage4 thinking resonates with people, because it takes back the message frame from those who created the myth that “mental illness” means the same as “dangerous to self or others.”

How does it feel to live with a mental illness? That (#mentalillnessfeelslike) is what we're focusing on during Mental Health Month in 2016. The reason is far from trivial. B4Stage4 means more than burying feelings and refusing to talk about them, and waiting for symptoms to clear up on their own. B4Stage4 means more than wishing that mental health problems aren't real, and hoping that they will never get worse. B4Stage4 means more than thinking that someone on the edge of a crisis will always pull himself or herself back without our help, and praying that someone else will intervene before a crisis occurs.

B4Stage4 means, in part, talking about what mental illnesses feel like, and then acting on that information. It means giving voice to feelings and fears, and to hopes and dreams. It means empowering people as agents of their own recovery. And it means changing the trajectories of our own lives for the better, and helping those we love change theirs.

It is our hope that our Mental Health Month toolkit for 2016 will help us all do just that, because the concept of mental health has meaning in two ways. The first is when we protect and preserve it. The second is when we recognize that it can be compromised, that mental illnesses are real, that recovery is always our goal, and that the best prospects for recovery come when we act B4Stage4.



Paul Gionfriddo  
President & CEO



# INTRODUCTION

Clinical terms are the words used by doctors and other professionals to describe the symptoms of a disorder, but often times those words don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like.

We know that two people with the same diagnosis can experience the same symptom and describe it in very different ways. Let's take fear for example: Jamie describes fear as being scared to the point of feeling paralyzed, while Andre describes fear as an overwhelming urge to run away. It can be confusing and sometimes contribute to ongoing silence or hesitation to get help. It's important for people to talk about how it feels to live with a mental illness.

This May, MHA is calling on you to share what *life with a mental illness* feels like by tagging your social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness. Sharing is the key to breaking down the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and to showing others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms.

By using the toolkit materials, you will help members of your community:

- Understand how common mental illnesses are and what it is like to live with them, reducing stigma;
- Start talking about mental health B4Stage4;
- Assess their own mental health through use of MHA's screening tools; and
- Share their personal experience with mental illness by tagging social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike, or uploading content directly to MHA's website at [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike).

This year's toolkit includes:

## Media Materials

- Key Messages
- Sample Press Release
- Drop-In Article
- May is Mental Health Month Proclamation

## Social Media and Web Components

- Sample Facebook and Twitter Posts
- Facebook Cover and Profile Images
- Twitter Header and Profile Images
- Instagram Profile Image
- Shareable Image optimized for Facebook and Twitter
- #mentalillnessfeelslike Call to Action Image
- Horizontal Banner Image
- Vertical Banner Image
- Hand held #mentalillnessfeelslike card

## Fact Sheets and Handouts

- Fact Sheet: Life with Anxiety
- Fact Sheet: Life with Depression
- Fact Sheet: Life with Bipolar
- Fact Sheet: Life with Psychosis
- Fact Sheet: Life in Recovery
- May is Mental Health Month Calendar/Poster
- Worksheet: Think Ahead
- Worksheet: What's Underneath
- Worksheet: Smash Stupid Thoughts

## QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about Mental Health Month, please contact Danielle Fritze, Director of Public Education and Visual Communications at [dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net).

# OUTREACH IDEAS

## How #mentalillnessfeelslike Works:

Mental Health America will have a page on our website at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where special software will collect Tweets, Pins (Pinterest), Vines and posts from Instagram and Tumblr tagged with #mentalillnessfeelslike that describe what it feels like when a person is living with a mental illness.

There will also be a place at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where people can post videos, images or words describing their personal experience with mental illness directly to the site (anonymously and outside of social media).

Unfortunately, Facebook and Youtube posts that use #mentalillnessfeelslike will not automatically be collected on the page due to the privacy restrictions of these social media platforms.

- Use the “hand held #mentalillnessfeelslike card” at public events. Have people write or draw what life with a mental illness feels like to them, then take a photo of them holding the card. Post the photos at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) or on your own social media pages (you can also send them to [dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net) if there are a bunch that you want to share with us).
- Post to your organization’s social media networks: Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, etc. to raise awareness of May as Mental Health Month. Make sure to use the May is Mental Health Month hashtag: #mentalillnessfeelslike and tag Mental Health America’s profile using the account information below so we can see it!

 /mentalhealthamerica

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 @mentalhealtham

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 @mentalhealthamerica

### Here are some other ideas to help you plan for outreach activities during the month of May:

- Ask your governor or mayor to declare May as Mental Health Month, using the sample proclamation that is part of the toolkit.
- Organize a community run or walk for mental health. Reach out to your local media for assistance in promoting the event. Email all of your partners, family members and friends, donors, and local officials inviting them to participate.
- Host a mental health screening or other educational event at a local venue (e.g., town hall, firehouse, church, mall or library). Have computers or tablets available for people to go to [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). Make sure to have a printer so people can print their results.
- Plan a day at your state Capitol. Invite advocates, consumers, concerned citizens and community and business leaders to visit each policymaker to discuss your community’s mental health needs.
- Host a meet-and-greet with local leaders in mental health and the community they serve at the local town square. Ask a consumer and local community leader to share why mental health is so important to them personally.
- If your community has a number of buildings with bell towers or a bell-ringing ensemble, ask them to ring their bells for mental health on May 1 or another day. Alert the public and the media in advance. Share toolkit materials with attendees.

We'll be reaching out in mid-June to ask about your outreach and impact. Make sure to keep track of your efforts by doing things like:

- Counting how many handouts you distribute;
- Tracking media hits and impressions;
- Keeping tally of likes, shares and retweets of your Mental Health Month posts on social media networks
- If you do a screening event or health fair, keep count of how many people visit your booth and/or take a screen; and
- Conducting a pre/post survey to see how you've increased knowledge about mental health issues among those you reach. Set up a quick survey of up to 10 questions for free online using [SurveyMonkey.com](http://SurveyMonkey.com).

## Let us know what you've got planned!

Tell us about your events so we can post them on MHA's Web Calendar, and help you get the word out. Contact Antionette Means at [ameans@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:ameans@mentalhealthamerica.net) with the following information:

Name of Event

Date

Location

Brief Description

Registration/Sign-Up Instructions

Contact Person

## Like our materials? Want more?

Brochures on assorted topics and B4Stage4 merchandise are available through the Mental Health America store to supplement the information provided in the 2016 May is Mental Health Month toolkit.

Visit the Mental Health America store by clicking the "Store" link on the dark blue menu bar at the top of the Mental Health America's website, [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).

**\*MHA Affiliates** – One of the benefits of being an affiliate is getting a discount on printed materials at the MHA store. To place an order, contact Antionette Means at 703-797-2592. There will also be extra May is Mental Health Month tools for you ("Affiliate Exclusives") on the Education and Outreach section of the Affiliate Only Site.

