

## May is National Mental Health Month-How Timely

As concerns grow about the mental health of frontline workers in the COVID-19 battle as well as for millions of Americans living in “shutdown” at home, stakeholders are scrambling to find and distribute resources to help deal with an already evident and likely to continue, surge in mental health issues.

Researchers have developed a model based on data accumulated after natural disasters, terrorist attacks and economic down turns that shows a likely spike in suicide, overdose deaths and the development of substance use disorders. These are in addition to a noted increase in depression, anxiety and reports of domestic violence. We have previously noted a 55% increase in alcohol sales during the first quarter of 2020 compared to last year. There has also been a 34% rise in prescriptions written for anxiolytic (anti-anxiety) drugs in February and March (over last year). Last week the Suffolk County District Attorney announced an increase in overdose deaths of 19 % year over year as well.

A recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed nearly half of all Americans report the COVID-19 crisis is harming their mental health. Another publication in Forbes Magazine confirms these finds indicate 53% of women and 37% of men say their mental health has been affected and 19% of those adding they have felt a major impact. A federal emergency hotline registered an increase in activity of >1000% for April 2020 compared to the same month in 2019 and that same line run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) received more than 20,000 texts.

What we're really seeing is a global experience of anxiety, and how that's impacting our day-to-day lives,” explains Kelli Finley, Executive Director of the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. With nearly a third of the world population on some form of coronavirus lockdown, lengthy periods of isolation and “social distancing” are leading to increased feelings of anxiety, depression and stress. For some people, the anxiety comes from a fear of getting sick or having their loved ones become ill. For others, it's the economic downturn and fear of unemployment, or having already lost a job. For many, it's the uncertainty of how long this unusual, isolated lifestyle will continue.

Finley expects that first-line responders, elderly people and teens, who are experiencing [rising levels of anxiety and depression](#), will be most impacted by a post-traumatic stress response to the pandemic. To date only a very small portion of the stimulus, crisis funding, approved by Congress has been earmarked for mental health resources.

University of Oxford research indicates anxiety disorders are already the most widespread of mental health disorders. In the United States anxiety disorders affect an estimated 40 million adults according to the Anxiety and [Depression](#) Association of America.

According to the Mayo Clinic, common symptoms of anxiety include sleep issues, challenges on thinking or focusing on topics other than what is triggering the worrying, sweating, trembling, restlessness, tension, nervousness, hyperventilation, challenges controlling worrying, avoiding anxiety triggers, increased heart rate, gastrointestinal issues, and a sense of impending doom, danger or panic. To manage normal anxiety, there are many steps that people can take such as getting adequate sleep, proper nutrition, and regular exercise. Make time for fun and relaxation, including hobbies, yoga, meditation, or listening to music to redirect the mind and calm the body. It is important to identify what is triggering the feelings of apprehension and create a plan. Remember your breath is a great asset too!

If COVID-19 is elevating anxiety, create a plan, do not panic. Practice good hygiene by washing hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap, avoiding touching the face with hands (especially the eyes, nose, and mouth), covering coughs with the elbow or tissue, and staying at home if sick. Stock supplies (food, medications, hygiene products, etc.) in the case of a 14-day or longer quarantine. Get a seasonal flu shot when able. Postpone nonessential travel, especially to areas with active outbreaks. Employers and education institutions can use virtual classrooms, using (video, Web, telecommunications) conferencing, allow working from home, postpone big gatherings, and reinforce the notion of staying at home if sick.

Mental health professionals such as psychiatrists and psychologists may assist in determining anxiety disorders that are not due to medical conditions. Anxiety disorders are treatable. Depending on the anxiety disorder, treatment may include medications (e.g. Anti-anxiety, antidepressants, and beta-blockers), managing the symptoms, cognitive behavioral therapy, and psychotherapy.

#### **Additional Help is Available:**

Back in late March New York State issued a call for licensed mental health clinicians to provide voluntary assistance to the general public; a call that was answered by some 14,000+ healthcare professionals statewide. The emotional support line number to call for assistance is **1-844-863-9314**

NAMI is providing free resources and essential services nationwide including a Crisis Text Line (**text "HELLO" to 741741**), a Disaster Distress Helpline (**call 1-800-985-5990** or **text "TalkWithUs" to 66746**) and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (**call 1-800-273-TALK**).

The Wellness Society has released a Corona Virus Anxiety workbook that is free to share. We have included a copy in this email. Visit their web site for other free tools. (You can also download the COVID-19 anxiety workbook here as well). <https://thewellnesssociety.org/>

Also attached are separate Directories for Behavioral Health Services in Nassau and Suffolk Counties in addition to the COVID-19 Anxiety Workbook.

Remember your mental health is as important as your physical health so be sure to devote an appropriate level of care for these specific needs. For assistance with a Mental Health issue call us.

LECSA remains operational and we are here to assist in any way we can. **631-851-1295**

Please continue to stay safe and do your part!