

## Mental Health Awareness Month

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that as many as 1 in 5 Americans struggles with a mental health condition, and data from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. Despite these staggering statistics, asking for help remains difficult for many, and studies reveal that as many as 50% of those suffering go untreated. A large reason for this is stigma, or the public perception of mental illness. This May marks the 70<sup>th</sup> Mental Health Awareness Month in the U.S. and the Dedham Human Rights Commission asks you to think about and promote awareness of mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for all.

Research conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) shows that stigma and discrimination, both experienced and anticipated, prevent people from either seeking help or fully participating in treatment. Stigma creates an atmosphere of shame and fear and perpetuates the erroneous belief that mental illness is both different from and less serious than physical illness, that it is a character flaw or a sign of weakness, and that individuals could just “get over it” if they tried hard enough. Worse than this judgment and discrimination from others is the fact that people dealing with mental health conditions will frequently internalize these messages, developing the beliefs that they should be able to control their illness without help, that they need to “tough it out” or “snap out of it”, and that they need to avoid admitting their condition and asking for help.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Most mental illnesses are treatable with the proper resources and support, with NAMI statistics citing a 70-90% improvement rate when treatment is engaged and maintained. Early intervention is significantly correlated with treatment success, highlighting the importance of reducing the stigma around acknowledging and seeking help for mental health conditions.

While finding the right help can seem daunting at first, there are community resources which can assist. One such resource is the INTERFACE referral service, provided free of charge to the community by William James College. The INTERFACE Helpline, staffed by resource and referral counselors, is open Monday through Friday 9am – 5pm, with a voicemail option for evenings and weekends. Services are confidential and are supported in part by the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Project (MCPAP) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Program. More information is available on [interface.williamjames.edu](http://interface.williamjames.edu).

In situations where an individual is in crisis, please seek more immediate care via a hospital emergency room, dialing 911, or contacting the Emergency Services Program for the Dedham area at 1-800-529-5077. This Emergency Services Program is provided by Riverside Community Care and is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Whatever the level of help you or your loved one seek, you do not have to go it alone.