



African American Community Facts About Mental Health

- ◆ Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing.
- ◆ Mental illnesses include such disorders as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic and other severe anxiety disorders, autism and pervasive developmental disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, borderline personality disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illnesses that affect the brain.
- ◆ These disorders can profoundly disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, moods, ability to relate to others and capacity for coping with the demands of life.
- ◆ Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people with serious mental illness need medication to help control symptoms, but also rely on supportive counseling, self-help groups, family support, assistance with housing, vocational rehabilitation, income assistance and other community services in order to achieve their highest level of recovery.
- ◆ African Americans are less likely to receive diagnosis and treatment for mental illnesses.
- ◆ Mental illnesses are biologically based brain disorders. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's "character" or intelligence.
- ◆ Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability (lost years of productive life) in the North America, Europe and, increasingly, in the world. By 2020, Major Depressive illness will be the leading cause of disability in the world for women and children.
- ◆ Mental illnesses strike individuals in the prime of their lives, often during adolescence and young adulthood. All ages are susceptible, but the young and the old are especially vulnerable.
- ◆ Without treatment the consequences of mental illness for the African American community and society are staggering: unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives; The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than 100 billion dollars each year in the United States.
- ◆ The best treatments for serious mental illnesses today are highly effective. African Americans respond favorably to culturally appropriate treatment (counseling, medication, peer and family support).
- ◆ Recovery is possible!
- ◆ You are not alone. NAMI is a nationwide organization of people with mental illness and their families.

*Call NAMI's free HelpLine number for information and referrals.
1-800-950-NAMI (6264) * www.nami.org*