

# SAMHSA and Ad Council Unveil National Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign

*Only One in Four Americans Believes People are Sympathetic Towards  
Those with Mental Illnesses*

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in partnership with the Ad Council, today launched a national awareness public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to decrease the negative attitudes that surround mental illness and encourage young adults to support their friends who are living with mental health problems.

“We took a new approach to de-stigmatizing mental illness with this campaign,” said Assistant Surgeon General Eric B. Broderick, SAMHSA Acting Deputy Administrator. “Instead of telling people why they shouldn’t discriminate against people with mental illnesses, we are showing how friends can be supportive of those who have disclosed they are having a mental health problem and the critical role that friendship plays in recovery.”

Despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Americans (85 percent) believe that people with mental illnesses are not to blame for their conditions, only about one in four (26 percent) agrees that people are generally caring and sympathetic toward individuals with mental illnesses, according to a new HealthStyles Survey released today. The survey data, licensed from Porter Novelli by SAMHSA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also found that only one-quarter of young adults believe that a person with a mental illness can eventually recover, and slightly more than one-half (54 percent) who know someone with a mental illness believe that treatment can help people with mental illnesses lead normal lives.

“The advances made in treatments and services for mental illnesses offer the hope of recovery for all,” said Acting Surgeon General Dr. Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H, who helped to kick off the campaign. “Mental illness is not something to be ashamed of. It is an illness that should be treated with the same urgency and compassion as any other illness. And just like any other illness, the support of friends and family members is key to recovery.”

According to SAMHSA, in 2005 there were an estimated 24.6 million adults aged 18 or older who experienced serious psychological distress (SPD), which is highly correlated with serious mental illness. Among 18 to 25 year olds, the prevalence of SPD is high (18.6 percent for 18-25, vs. 11.3 percent for all adults 18 years of age and older). But this age group shows the lowest rate of help-seeking behaviors. Additionally, those with mental health conditions in this segment have a high potential to minimize future disability if social acceptance is broadened and they receive the right support and services early on.

Created pro bono by Grey Worldwide, the PSA campaign aims to reach 18- to 25-year-old adults who have friends living with mental illnesses. It highlights the importance of their providing support. Featuring a voiceover by Tony award-winning actor Liev Schreiber, the television and radio spots illustrate how friendship is the key to recovery. The campaign also includes print and interactive advertising that directs audiences to visit a new comprehensive Web site, [www.whatadifference.samhsa.gov](http://www.whatadifference.samhsa.gov), to learn more about mental health and what they can do to play a role in their friend's recovery.

“The prevalence of mental illness among young adults in our country is staggering. We need to reduce the widespread stigma and provide a greater opportunity for recovery,” said Peggy Conlon, President and CEO of The Advertising Council. “The compelling PSAs show young adults the critical role they have in supporting friends with mental illnesses, and will help reduce the stigma. Additionally, this age group can be a great catalyst for the rest of the population.”

In addition to collaborating with the CDC, SAMHSA's National Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign has partnered with other federal agencies, including the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), State mental health agencies, leading researchers on stigma, and a broad coalition of stakeholders, including organizations that represent provider organizations and consumer and family member groups. The Campaign held a series of regional meetings to develop a grassroots network to support the Campaign and provide assistance with anti-stigma efforts to States and local communities.

A resource guide entitled, "Developing a Stigma Reduction Initiative," was also recently released and is based on the evaluation and lessons learned from the Elimination of Barriers Initiative. The guide provides information on how to mount a statewide anti-stigma campaign, examples of outreach materials, reports on the best practices for stigma reduction, and lists important resources for technical assistance. Copies of the guide can be obtained by calling SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Clearinghouse at 1-800-789-2647.

To view the ads, please visit [www.whatadifference.samhsa.gov](http://www.whatadifference.samhsa.gov). The PSAs were distributed to more than 28,000 media outlets nationwide earlier this month and will air in advertising time that will be donated by the media.

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*SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for improving the accountability, capacity and effectiveness of the nation's substance abuse prevention, addictions, treatment and mental health services delivery system. SAMHSA can be reached at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).*

The Advertising Council is a private, non-profit organization that has been the largest producer of PSAs in the nation since 1942. To learn more about the Ad Council and its campaigns, visit [www.adcouncil.org](http://www.adcouncil.org).