Mental Illness Awareness Week
“There’s HOPE: Hold on Pain Ends”
October 2-8, 2016

AKA and NAMI Partnership

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. is partnering with National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) to raise awareness of behavioral health conditions in the African-American community and increase service utilization in order to enhance the lives of persons of color who struggle with behavioral health challenges. Although anyone can develop a mental health problem, African Americans sometimes experience more severe forms of mental health conditions due to unmet needs and other barriers. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population. NAMI has resources to help in this effort.

- See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf

What is NAMI?

National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) has resources to help increase mental health awareness in African American communities. One resource, NAMI’s Sharing Hope Program is an hour-long program in which the presenters share their journeys to recovery and explore signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. The program also highlights how and where to find help. Sharing Hope: An African American Guide to Mental Health provides mental health information in a sensitive manner through personal stories. Recovery is possible and this booklet tells you where to find more information, seek help and be supportive. You can preview the guide for free or buy hard copies through the NAMI Bookstore. See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf

Lack of Information and Misunderstanding about Mental Health

In the African American community, many people misunderstand what a mental health condition is and don’t talk about this topic. One in five (1 in 5) people are affected by mental illness. This means that even if we don’t talk about it, most likely, all of us have or know someone who has one of these illnesses. This lack of knowledge leads many to believe that a mental health condition is a personal weakness or some sort of punishment from God. African Americans may be reluctant to discuss mental health issues and seek treatment because of the shame and stigma associated with it.

Also, many African Americans have difficulty recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, leading to underestimating the effects and impact of mental health conditions. Some may think of depression as “the blues” or something to “snap out of”.

Mental health conditions can begin to develop in young children. Because they’re still learning how to identify and talk about thoughts and emotions, their most obvious symptoms are behavioral. Symptoms in children may include:

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

Because of the lack of information surrounding mental health issues, it’s not always clear where to find help when you may need it. Don’t allow fear of what others may think prevent you or a loved one from getting better. - See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf; http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Know-the-Warning-Signs#sthash.sbyCTMhV.dpuf
Faith, Spirituality and Community

In the African American community, family, community and spiritual beliefs tend to be great sources of strength and support. However, research has found that many African Americans rely on faith, family and social communities for emotional support rather than turning to health care professionals, even though medical and/or therapeutic treatment may be necessary.

Faith and spirituality can really help in the recovery process but it should not be the only option you pursue. If spirituality is an important part of your life, your spiritual practices can be a strong part of your treatment plan. Your spiritual leaders and faith community can provide support and reduce isolation. Be aware that sometimes faith communities can be a source of distress and stigma if they are misinformed about mental health or do not know how to support families dealing with these conditions.

Do rely on your family, community and faith for support, but it also might be necessary to seek professional help as well.

- See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf

Reluctance and Inability to Access Mental Health Services

Only about one-quarter of African Americans seek mental health care, compared to 40% of whites. Here are some reasons why:

- Distrust and misdiagnosis. Historically, African Americans have been and continue to be negatively affected by prejudice and discrimination in the health care system. Misdiagnoses, inadequate treatment and lack of cultural competence by health professionals breed distrust and prevent many African Americans from seeking or staying in treatment.
- Socio-economic factors play a part, too and can make treatment options less available. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2012, 19% of African Americans have no form of health insurance. The Affordable Care Act is making it easier and more affordable to get insured.
- A lack of African American mental health professionals. Only 3.7% of members in the American Psychiatric Association and 1.5% of members in the American Psychological Association are African American.

- See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf

Finding the Right Provider

The first place to start looking for a behavioral health provider is in your insurance network. You can improve your chances of getting culturally sensitive care by asking questions. Here are some questions you could ask:

- Have you treated other African Americans?
- Have you received training in cultural competence or on African American mental health?
- How do you see our cultural backgrounds influencing our communication and my treatment?
- How do you plan to integrate my beliefs and practices in my treatment?

Your mental health provider will play an important role in your treatment, so make sure you can work with this person and that you communicate well together. Mention your beliefs, values and cultural characteristics. Make sure that s/he understands them so that they can be considered in the course of your treatment. For example, mention whether it is important for you that your family be part of your treatment.

If finances are preventing you from finding help, get in contact with a local health or mental health clinic or your local government to see what services you qualify for. You can find contact information online at findtreatment.samhsa.gov, or by calling the National Treatment Referral Helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357).

- See more at: http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-American-Mental-Health#sthash.jICw89He.dpuf
Behavioral Health and the Law

In a mental health crisis, people are more likely to encounter police than get medical help. As a result, 2 million people with mental illness are booked into jails each year. Nearly 15% of men and 30% of women booked into jails have a serious mental health condition. The vast majority of the individuals are not violent criminals—most people in jails are have not yet gone to trial, so they are not yet convicted of a crime. The rest are serving short sentences for minor crimes. NAMI believes that by partnering with criminal justice leaders, county and state leaders and mental health professionals we can help people with mental illness get the support and services they need to stay out of jail.

The Stepping Up Initiative

NAMI is a partner in The Stepping Up Initiative, an exciting national campaign to challenge counties to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails. NAMI joins other national organizations calling on counties and communities nationwide to address this problem.

Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and Other Local Programs

NAMI Affiliates around the country partner with local law enforcement on crisis intervention team (CIT) programs to help police recognize a mental health problem and get people to treatment. We also work on a variety of jail diversion programs, re-entry programs, and provide education and support to individuals and families at risk of involvement in the justice system.

Support to Families

NAMI’s Helpline responds to more calls from worried families about a loved one in jail than any other issue. We provide resources and referrals to legal services.

- See more at: http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Public-Policy/Jailing-People-with-Mental-Illness#sthash.OkAL2z4Q.dpuf

Mental Illness Awareness Quick Facts:

Mental illness affects everyone! It is estimated that 1 in 5 adults (approximately 43 Million adults) experience symptoms of mental illness each year. If you are not affected directly, you may be affected indirectly because your loved one, parent, sibling, child, friend, or co-worker may be affected.

Approximately 13% of the US population identifies as African American. Of that 13%, approximately 7 million of us had a diagnosable mental health crisis in the last year. It might not have been you. It might have been a loved one, a parent, a sibling, your child, a friend, or a co-worker. Very few African-Americans seek mental health treatment even though help is available.

In 2015, the Centers for Disease Control encouraged all US men who struggle with Depression and Anxiety to get treatment. Of particular concern was for the needs of young men of color who are virtually absent from accessing mental health care. We HOPE that you encourage the man in your life to get the care and support he needs for his mental health symptoms.

Depression is not a weakness, a curse, a punishment, or a lack of faith. People with depression cannot “just get over it”.

It’s been estimated that approximately 1 in 25 (or approximately 10 million) adults live with serious mental illness such as Schizophrenia. If you are not affected directly, you may be affected indirectly because your loved one, parent, sibling, child, friend, or co-worker may be affected.

Join grassroots organizations like NAMI so that our voices can be heard and our struggles with behavioral health challenges can be addressed. Pay attention during the November 2016 election. Vote for candidates who are sensitive to the needs of individuals affected by mental illness. Get involved.