

Annual Anti-Stigma Public Awareness Campaign

Overview

An overwhelming number of veterans struggle with behavioral health. The most common forms of these difficulties are Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). Yet despite the overwhelming prevalence of these invisible maladies, approximately half of those suffering do not to pursue care.

Some believe they can tough out their struggles. Others are unaware of the availability of help. The reasons those struggling with behavior health problems do not seek care are myriad. In large part, however, the care gap can be attributed to preconceived notions of what it means to struggle with “behavioral health”, a problem extending to service members, veterans, and civilian society as a whole. The accumulation of widely-held negative beliefs comprises a stigma that inspires fear and mistrust, prevents veterans and service members from seeking care, and is destructive to the local community.

There are three types of stigma:

1. **Public or societal stigma**, referring to public misconceptions toward individuals with psychological problems;
2. **Individual stigma**, resulting from a person's internalization of the public's negative perceptions; and
3. **Institutional stigma**, occurring when policies regarding mental health unreasonably limit the opportunities of an individual.ⁱ

Together, these types of stigma form a barrier to treatment. In order to effectively heal the psychological trauma of war, we must challenge the notion that seeking aid for behavioral health problems is a sign of weakness or flawed character. We must raise public awareness of the realities of the behavioral health disorders afflicting our veterans. As citizens and as communities, we must take steps to provide adequate and continuous care for the service members and veterans that so long have provided for us.

Basic activities: 1) Plan the Campaign, 2) Develop Awareness Strategies, 3) Implement the Campaign, and 4) Raise Awareness and Eliminate Stigma on an Individual Basis.

Is it being done already? Assess any ongoing efforts within your community prior to initiating your own public awareness campaign. Military installations and family service organizations are the most likely to plan such events, and many advertise these online. You may also wish to contact these organizations over the phone or in person to develop a more complete idea of their current and future awareness plans. Many will have some form of advocacy planned for the Military Appreciation Month (May) and/or National PTSD Awareness Day (June). Regardless, keep these dates firmly in mind; you may wish to one or more of these preset awareness periods to accentuate your own efforts. If you find an organization conducting such a campaign, maintain contact. You may be able to work together using the steps outlined below. Even if your goals do not align, it never hurts to be aware of the various organizations acting within your community.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Plan the Campaign

Now that you have assessed your community, it is time to design your own anti-stigma campaign. Your community evaluation should have left you with some idea of what is already being done. With that in mind, it is time to set some parameters. Here are a few things to consider:

- **National PTSD Awareness Day:** Capitalize on established behavioral health awareness days. Organizations and communities nationwide often step up efforts to promote PTSD awareness on the days around June 27th, and there may be public events, speakers, and other activities planned by local military and veterans' groups, many of which offer partnership opportunities. Active involvement in your community's activities is an effective and necessary strategy when designing an anti-stigma campaign.
- **Budget:** Budget early! Monetary constraints will impose a number of restrictions on your public awareness campaign. What type of literature do you intend to create and disseminate? How many brochures and posters will you need? Will you create television or radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)? Have you recruited any volunteers? Should you hire workers, and if so, how much should they be paid? Do you need tables, chairs, and other materials? The extent of your anti-stigma efforts will be determined by your fiscal solvency and the particular needs of your individual community.
- **Time-frame:** Determine the time constraints of your campaign prior to its launch. Set specific targets, such as a week-long content development period, a week of active campaigning, a week of post-campaign assessment, etc. Doing so will keep your team focused, and will familiarize you with possible difficulties down the road. Volunteers can only work limited hours, for example, and television and radio stations may only provide limited airtime for your PSA. An efficient schedule will provide the team with enough time to work around these limitations.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Throughout this document, you will see “Volunteer

Opportunities.” One of the best ways to raise awareness, recruit advocates, and implement this practice with limited resources is by recruiting volunteers. Local organizations, such as veteran and military service organizations, American Psychological Association (APA) chapters, psychology departments at local universities, and enlisted and officers' spouses clubs may be able to provide valuable human resources and input. Local High schools, colleges and universities are another valuable source of volunteers. Ask local high schools, universities, and colleges if you can place recruitment fliers on their campuses. Many also have specific summer job websites, bulletin boards, and newsletters you may be able to incorporate into your recruitment strategy.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign Recruiter

Task: Recruit volunteers for the anti-stigma campaign; be able to discuss behavioral health stigma with interested parties; create and disseminate campaign literature; and organize recruitment drives across the community.

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers should possess excellent social skills. Enthusiasm is of particular importance for campaign recruiters. Volunteers should also be willing and able to learn about and discuss behavioral health stigma. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

Step 2: Develop Awareness Strategies

There is an unequal distribution of resources between communities. Some have an abundance of willing volunteers, others a scarcity; some have public funding for outreach and awareness programs, and others do not. In order to mount a strong, effective public awareness campaign, determine what will be most effective, and how best to operate within the constraints imposed by time, funding, and participation. Here are some examples of various types of literature used by many public awareness campaigns:

- **Develop an “Elevator Speech”:** An elevator speech is a brief synopsis of the purpose, goal, and importance of the public awareness campaign. It should answer, in two minute or less, the following questions: Who are you? Why is this issue important? How does it affect my community? What can I do about it? A strong, focused elevator speech can make or break a campaign. Most individuals will give only the briefest license to the various instruments of the public awareness campaign, so it important that each be as pointed and persuasive as possible.
- **Make It Personal:** The most effective way to engage the community about eliminating stigma is by putting a human face on the issue. While fact sheets and other campaign paraphernalia can be informative and useful, they are generally poor as prime motivators. Make behavioral health understandable by stressing its impact within the community.

- Perhaps the best way to do this is by recruiting speakers from the local military community and inviting them tell their stories where appropriate – public gatherings, church groups, town hall meetings, etc. As a corollary, behavioral health workers and other health care advocates also make excellent speakers. Organizations such as **Give an Hour** have members throughout the country, and may be open to participation in this strategy. See *Other Resources* for more ideas.
- **Donations:** The solicitation of donations is important to the success of any public awareness campaign, particularly if funding is a problem. Many businesses and organizations are happy to donate to charitable causes – doing so provides an excellent PR opportunity and improves the community in which they live and operate. Initiate contact as high up the hierarchy as possible, explain the importance of behavioral health awareness to the community, and try to provide a specific, manageable request.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign Capacity Builder

Task: Compile a list of local businesses, organizations, universities, etc. that might be willing to participate in or donate to the campaign; identify potential public speakers within the community; and convey the importance of behavioral health awareness to interested parties.

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers should be familiar with basic research techniques. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

The specific types of campaign materials to be created and disseminated must also be decided in advance of awareness efforts. There are the documents volunteers will hand out, that interested parties will take home, and that will point to specific reasons behavioral health is an important issue. Some of the most common forms of literature are as follows:

- **Pamphlets, Fliers, and Other Handouts:** Cheap and easy to create, handouts are a cornerstone of most public awareness campaigns. Effective literature varies widely in content, but generally material for public dissemination should present a clear picture of the topic. Remember, your goals are to raise awareness and to eliminate stigma. Stress the symptoms of common behavioral health disorders and the normality of behavioral health concerns. Emphasize the availability of care within the community. See *Other Resources* at the end of this document for an example created by the University of Southern California School of Social Work.
- **Brochures:** Brochures should provide a more in-depth look at PTSD, MDD, and TBI. Compile a list of places where you can distribute your brochures. In many cases, it is helpful to coordinate with local mental health and veterans organizations to find events where your message will have the greatest impact: veterans' gatherings, doctors' offices, VA hospitals, university campuses, military bases, etc.
- **Public Service Announcements (PSAs):** PSAs are among the most effective methods of raising public awareness. Television and radio announcements can reach entire communities at once, and are more likely to grasp and retain the attention of the populace at large than handouts and brochures. Though costly and time-consuming to develop independently, some behavioral health organizations may have ready-made PSAs for use in public awareness campaigns. See *Other Resources* for some

suggestions.

- **Approach local media:** Television and radio stations are perfect avenues for the PSAs you have acquired or designed. Approach the local stations in your area and see if they are willing to donate airtime for your message. Call or visit in person, and be sure to speak with someone in a position of authority. Again, use the pre-designed elevator speech to begin, and support your statements with additional information as necessary.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign Managers

Task: Research behavioral health disorders such as PTSD, MDD, and TBI; locate successful examples of previous anti-stigma and public awareness campaigns; recommend procedures for raising public awareness and eliminating stigma; and formulate an overall plan for current and future campaigns.

Attributes: Enthusiastic, well-organized, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers should be familiar with basic research techniques, experience with graphic/media software, and strong writing skills. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

Step 3: Implement the Campaign

Once you have designed the basic infrastructure of the public awareness campaign, it is time to get everything off the ground. Here are some ideas general ideas you may find useful in your efforts to eliminate stigma:

- **Advertise:** Raising public awareness has a great deal in common with marketing. Advertise what you have already accomplished, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. If you convened a support group or partnered with local organizations, for example, then feel free to leverage that towards your continued awareness efforts. Spread word about your campaign and its importance in your particular community. Make it relevant to the daily lives of the community members.
- **Centralize:** A centralized location is helpful throughout all the stages of the campaign process. Once implementation begins, it becomes even more important. Be sure to have a centralized location, phone number, and email address for interested parties to use as a point of contact. This location will answer queries about behavioral health and the elimination of stigma, provide additional information for those whose interest was sparked by the campaign, and direct military families to the services and organizations they need.
- **Establish a Presence:** Be sure to have a presence at any community events, such as fairs, town hall meetings, church meetings, etc. Many high-traffic areas also allow organizations to table in public space, though some areas may charge licensing fees or require registration. A presence in such locations allows you to disseminate literature and talk to interested parties. High visibility within a community is pivotal to the success of your awareness efforts.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Anti-Stigma Public Awareness Campaign Volunteer

Task: Identify possible venues for the distribution of campaign literature; attain permits as necessary; distribute literature regarding common behavioral health disorders within the target population, with the goal of raising public awareness, eliminating stigma, and publicizing available services; utilize oratory skills to explain the cause to interested parties.

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers must be able to learn about and discuss the behavioral health difficulties facing veterans and service members. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

Step 4: Raise Awareness and Eliminate Stigma on an Individual Basis

Stigma is the unfortunate result of widespread misconceptions about the realities of behavioral health. This stigma, a poisonous mixture of ignorance and error, pervades every level of society. As a consequence of this prevalence, many of those afflicted with behavioral health disorders have internalized public ideas and attitudes about their maladies, often with dire consequences. Many suffer alone, fearing that their struggles indicate a lack of character, or present a threat to their career, or will irrevocably damage their personal relationships.

By raising public awareness, we aspire to eliminate individual stigma before it can affect our service members and veterans. Yet we must endeavor, too, to provide options for those service members and veterans for whom behavioral health represents an immediate and pressing need. Here are some ways to raise awareness and combat individual stigma:

- **Convene a Peer Support Group:** Support groups are an effective tool for dealing with behavioral health problems. Though not a substitute for professional care, they provide a venue for veterans, service members, and military families to discuss and work through issues with their peers. Find a venue – again, many schools, businesses, and other organizations are willing to provide rooms in the evening for a charitable cause – and start by recruiting key members of the local community.
- **Demystify Veteran Benefits:** All veterans are able to access the services offered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, but level of service provided is dependent on a number of factors, such as discharge status, priority level in terms of need, and length of time in the military. The process can be difficult to navigate, and many are unaware of the extent of their benefits. Promoting awareness of VA services is among the most important tasks of any behavioral health plan. Coordinate with Vet Centers in your community to provide information about the care and benefits available. See *Other Resources*.
- **Promote Third Party Programs:** There are a wide variety of programs beyond the VA, many of which provide extremely valuable services for service members and veterans. Some are directly invested in raising public awareness and eliminating stigma, such as **In Their Boots**, while others, such as the **Coming Home Project**, provide free retreats and counseling to at-need service members and veterans. Many of these organizations offer their own outreach materials and are willing to provide them free of cost. These

non-profits provide some of the greatest resources for community programs. See *Other Resources*.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Community Coordinator

Task: Locate events and venues where the public awareness campaign may be able to establish a presence; contact the managers of these events and venues and solicit permission for the public awareness campaign to discuss stigma, table, and disseminate literature.

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers should possess excellent oral and written skills, and be comfortable emailing, calling, and coordinating with people they do not know. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

Measure Your Success

Measuring the success of your anti-stigma efforts is important. The ability to track the change created by your anti-stigma efforts will motivate your workers and volunteers. Even more important is knowing what about your anti-stigma campaign worked, and what was ineffective. Future efforts will rely on the lessons they can glean from your first campaign, and so it is important to provide an objective evaluation of the process.

Depending on your available resources, it can be difficult to accurately measure the success of your public awareness campaign. The simplest and most effective way to do so is through surveys. In addition to surveying, you may wish to measure your success in other ways. Here are some supplemental methods you can use:

- **Assess Campaign Materials:** Compare the amount of material disseminated during the campaign with the amount of material created. Though not a rigorous measurement of public awareness, doing so provide valuable information about your literature and distribution methods. Were some areas of the community disproportionately interested or disinterested? Were some types of literature more commonly distributed than others? This information will allow you to better focus successive awareness efforts.
- **Social Media and Web Analytics:** Analyze the success of your web presence, if applicable, by using tools like Google PageRank. If you decided to incorporate a social media aspect into your awareness campaign, be sure to take stock of the digital footprint of your efforts. How many fans/likes/comments did your page receive on Facebook? How many tweets/retweets were created about your efforts? Such data can provide a fast-and-loose idea of the growth and size of public awareness.
- **Track Media Coverage:** Note any coverage of your public awareness efforts by the local media, such as newspaper articles, the airing of your PSAs, mention of your efforts in the local news, etc. This should provide a sense of the presence achieved by your public awareness campaign.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Post-Campaign Auditors

Task: Analyze the success of the public awareness campaign by participating in surveying efforts, tracking social media footprint, auditing campaign materials, and tracking media coverage.

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, and interested in the military community.

Who: Volunteers should be familiar with basic research techniques. Experience with statistical analysis is extremely helpful. Members of the military community are encouraged to apply.

Hours: Flexible.

Other Resources

- 100 Faces of War Experience: <http://www.100facesofwarexperience.org/>
 - A project of Matt Mitchell, an artist who intends to paint the portrait of 100 veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq. A brief biographical sketch is included with the portrait. Though ongoing, the 100 Faces of War Experience provides a harrowing look at real veterans, and the effect of war on the human soul.
- The Coming Home Project: <http://www.cominghomeproject.net/>
 - A non-profit organization providing holistic services for veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as their families and service providers. The project provides many levels of physical and emotional support, such as counseling and retreats.
- Common Pitfalls in Conducting a Survey: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demogrph/pdf/pitfalls.pdf>
 - A guide to the most common mistakes made when conducting a survey, published by the country of Fairfax, VA.
- Give an Hour: <http://www.giveanhour.org/>
 - A nonprofit organization that provides free mental health services to U.S. military personnel and families affected by the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- In Their Boots: <http://www.va.gov/>
 - A documentary series about the impact of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on soldiers, veterans, and families at home. Each episode focuses on our servicemen and women, and shows first-hand the profound changes wrought by military action since 2001.
- The Pathway Home: <http://www.thepathwayhome.org/>
 - A residential recovery program created for veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, The Pathway Home provides extensive care for those trying to cope with the stress of war. As the project itself states, "Our mission is to provide the respect, guidance, and support that each Warrior needs to rebound from combat or other challenging military experiences."
- Real Men. Real Depression Campaign Overview: <http://aaronrochlen.edb.utexas.edu/download/PDFs/2005-RMRDOverview.pdf>
 - An analysis of the Real Men. Real Depression program, a highly successful public awareness campaign designed in 2003 by the National Institute for Mental Health. The overview provides a detailed look at the methodology of a public awareness campaign.
- Real Warriors Campaign: <http://www.realwarriors.net/>
 - An initiative launched by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, the Real Warriors Campaign was designed to promote help-seeking behavior among service members and veterans with behavioral health difficulties. The Real Warriors Campaign offers extensive resources for outreach and public awareness, including PSAs, fliers, posters, brochures, and much more.

- Sample Outreach Infographic: <http://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/national-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-awareness-day/>
 - Designed by the University of Southern California School of Social Work, this sample flier provides an excellent example of the type of material you should consider for use in your own campaign. The flier is available for public use, and can be utilized as principal literature or as a model.
- Volunteer Recruitment Tools & Resources
 - Volunteer Leader Toolkit
 - <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/volunteers/gethandson/toolkits>
 - Effective Volunteer Recruitment Strategies
 - http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Effective_Volunteer_Recruitment_Strategies.pdf
 - Crafting a Volunteer Recruitment Message:
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Crafting_a_Volunteer_Recruitment_Message.pdf
 - The Three R's: Recruitment, Retention, Recognition
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Three_Rs_Recruitment_Retention_Recognition.pdf

ⁱ Ibid.