



# THE BELL

The newsletter of the National Mental Health Association ■ Vol. 2003, No. 1

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## 108th Congress Offers New Chance for Parity

NMHA and mental health advocates have fought tirelessly for legislation that would require parity between health insurance coverage for mental and physical disorders. With the current congressional session in full swing, those who have long championed these initiatives have another opportunity to persuade Congress to ban insurance discrimination against people who have mental disorders.

On Feb. 27, congressional legislators introduced the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act, which mirrors other parity bills that received overwhelming support on Capitol Hill last year.

Named in honor of the late-Minnesota senator who tirelessly championed the rights of people who have mental illnesses, this bill would close the loopholes in a 1996 law that *continued on page 2*

## NMHA Works to Strengthen Nation's Mental Health Response to Disaster

On Sept. 11, 2001, the United States learned how vulnerable it is to unheralded terrorist attacks. We have since realized that such threats are as varied as they are unpredictable. After the tragedy, communities were exposed to mail-based anthrax scares and serial shootings, all as the nation continues to react to vague warnings about terrorist threats and continuing economic challenges. And fears are only heightened by the war in Iraq, and concern over future threats.

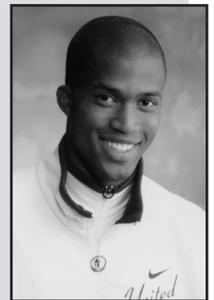
NMHA is conducting several initiatives to help the public cope with the stress and unease these conditions create, and to help communities respond to people's mental health needs in times of crisis and disaster.

### New Fact Sheets

NMHA has posted on its Web site a series of "coping" fact sheets MHAs and the public can download. These publications provide *continued on page 2*

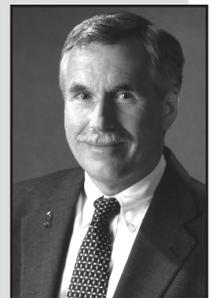
## Olympic Athlete Keynote Speaker at NMHA's Annual Conference

Olympic Gold Medalist Derek Adkins will discuss his struggle with depression in his keynote address at NMHA's Annual Conference, "America's Mental Health Crisis: Finding Solutions Together," June 4-7, 2003.



*Derek Adkins*

Michael Hogan, chair of the President's New Freedom Commission for Mental Health, will give conference participants the inside track on the commission's findings.



*Michael Hogan*

**See article on page 5.**

### Special Notice:

### NMHA's State Advocacy Update Is Going Electronic!

NMHA's free quarterly newsletter with the latest in state mental health news and analysis is now available online only.

To get NMHA's *State Advocacy Update*, go to <https://secured.nmha.org/secure/emailservices.cfm> and fill in the requested information.

**NMHA State Advocacy Update**

## From the President

When I read any given

day's newspaper headlines, I

can't help but think of the saying: May you be cursed to live in interesting times. We wake each day to news of the latest developments in the war in Iraq, threats of terrorism in the "homeland," the spread of mysterious new viruses and continuing economic uncertainty.

But, rather than waiting "for the next shoe to drop," NMHA and its affiliates have been devising strategies and programs to anticipate those threats and help defuse the stress they trigger. We are hard at work in our communities to help people cope with this dizzying flood of events. And, this summer, we will distribute to mental health responders nationally NMHA's *Blueprint for Responding to Public Mental Health Needs in Times of Crisis*, a disaster mental health manual developed with input from the affiliate field that includes lessons learned by MHAs throughout the country. We will also send trainers into the field to help MHAs improve their disaster response capabilities.

As difficult as these times are, I look forward to working with you to share and build on these lessons learned to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Together, we will find new, innovative ways to overcome them.

Sincerely,



Michael M. Faenza  
President and CEO



## 108th Congress Offers New Chance for Parity

*continued from front page*

allows employers to substitute new restrictions on mental health benefits for those it prohibits. This new legislation "highlights the glaring discrimination in health insurance that still routinely confronts people who need mental health care," said NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza. "Congress and the Bush administration must make this issue a top priority this year." Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Reps. Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., and Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., are sponsoring this year's parity legislation, S. 486 and H.R. 953.

Last year, 256 national mental health-related and other organizations endorsed this legislation, which large majorities in both the House of Representatives and Senate cosponsored. Last April, President Bush also called on Congress to pass parity legislation by the end of 2002. Despite this huge display of bipartisan support, Congress failed to act on the bills before it adjourned for the year, opting only to extend the flawed 1996 law.

NMHA's affiliates throughout the country were instrumental in encouraging congressional members to cosponsor last year's bills, and are mobilizing again to push through the new legislation this year. NMHA is also working with the organizations that endorsed last year's bill (all of which have also endorsed this year's legislation) along with more than 30 new organizations to ask their members to urge their representatives and senators to cosponsor and pass the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act.

"With strong backing from the public, it's clear the time to act to is now," said Faenza. "We welcome the introduction of this legislation and urge Congress to act quickly to pass it." 

## NMHA Works to Strengthen Nation's Mental Health Response to Disaster

*continued from front page*

tips for people in all walks of life on how to prepare for crises and disasters, how to discuss these issues with children, and how to cope with the stress these threats trigger. Spanish-language version of selected fact sheets are also available. An online press kit discusses ways to cope with the observance of the anniversary of the September 11 attacks and how to deal with grief. There's also a series of fact sheets that describe how to cope with media coverage of the war in Iraq.

### *Blueprint for Disaster Response*

One of NMHA's most ambitious initiatives now underway is the *Blueprint for Responding to Public Mental Health Needs in Times of Crisis* project. This project is designed to help ensure that every community has a disaster plan that includes a strong mental health care response component. Supported with funding from the BP Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the *Blueprint* manual is designed to provide MHAs and other mental health organizations with a wealth of information they can use to devise and enhance their own disaster response plans, and to help them participate in state and community disaster response planning efforts. It describes the needs of the public and various communities that mental health care responders would serve. It also details the organizational, policy, political, outreach and financial issues that must be considered and insight into the "players" involved in mounting various types of responses. And a wealth of case studies describe lessons learned by affiliates across the country that have responded to a range of crises and disasters. NMHA will also send professionals to hold a series of training sessions that will help affiliates learn how to develop and implement their disaster response plans.

Disaster planning has become an enduring fact of life in the United States and throughout the world. NMHA will work with its affiliates to help people minimize the stress these new and unfamiliar incidents can cause, and strengthen existing systems to deal with them. 

## Trying to be Understood: Actor Describes His Quest for Diagnosis and Treatment

by Maurice Bernard

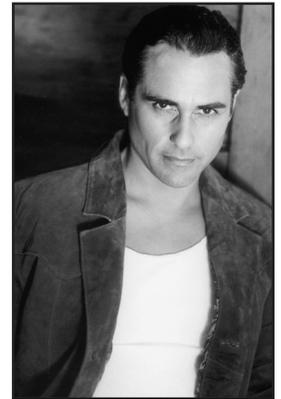
Many television viewers may know me as the actor who played Desi Arnaz in the television movie, “Lucy and Desi: Before the Laughter,” or as the elusive Sonny Corinthos on ABC’s daytime drama, *General Hospital*. But I’m living one of my most challenging roles as one of the estimated 2.5 million Americans who have bipolar disorder, a condition I’ve battled for 17 years.

I used to think my illness helped me in my career as an actor—until a manic episode almost forced me to quit while working on *General Hospital*. Fortunately, the staff there gave me a lot of support and let me take time off to seek help. Now, after 10 years of treatment, I’m more successful than ever.

It wasn’t easy to get the help—or even the diagnosis—I needed, however. Bipolar disorder is often misdiagnosed—the average person who has this illness can consult four doctors and receive more than three misdiagnoses before someone identifies it accurately. In my case, even though I was diagnosed at the age of 22, that breakthrough didn’t come until I’d been misdiagnosed several times. One physician told me I had a brain virus; another said I’d had a mental breakdown.

At that time, we knew far less than we do now about bipolar disorder. As a result, neither my friends nor my family recognized the warning signs until I had my first episode. Only after I saw a doctor who finally diagnosed me correctly was I able to seek the treatment I needed.

When NMHA asked me to partner in its public service campaign to educate the public about bipolar disorder, I jumped at the chance. My message to those who have—or suspect they may have—this illness is: You don’t have to go through what I did. Help is available and treatment works. So, don’t give up and, if you need it, do seek help. If left untreated, this illness can be devastating but it’s highly manageable with the proper medication, talk therapy and support. I’m living proof of that. 📺



*Maurice Bernard is featured on the Bipolar Disorder: Do You Know It? section of NMHA’s Web site along with additional downloadable educational materials at <http://www.nmha.org/bipolar>.*

### Survey Shows Stereotypes Still Surround Bipolar Disorder NMHA Launches New Campaign to Help Improve Awareness

A recent NMHA survey conducted by Harris Interactive drives home American’s misunderstanding of bipolar disorder. Some highlights of the survey include:

- More than 60 percent of people can identify bipolar disorder as a mental illness, but more than two-thirds of those surveyed said they knew little or nothing about it.
- Two out of three people surveyed (67 percent) believe that people with bipolar disorder are extremely emotional and sensitive people.
- About 75 percent of those surveyed reported being comfortable being friends with someone who has bipolar disorder and 62 percent are comfortable working with or for someone with bipolar disorder; but only one in three (32 percent) said they felt comfortable dating someone with bipolar disorder.

NMHA recently launched its new “Bipolar Disorder: Do You Know It?” public awareness campaign to address these misunderstandings. “These stereotypes are real barriers that prevent those who may have the illness from seeking the care they need,” said NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza. “Too many Americans are living with bipolar disorder and are unaware of the illness and the toll it may be taking on their lives, work and relationships. We hope the ‘Bipolar Disorder: Do You Know It?’ campaign will offer them a way to get life-saving information and help.”

*NMHA’s Bipolar Disorder campaign is made possible through seed funding from GlaxoSmithKline.*

# Thirty-Year-Old Compeer Program Reduces Stigma, One Friendship At a Time

This year, the Mental Health Association of Rochester/Monroe County, N.Y., celebrates three decades of success in helping people with mental illnesses to ease an often difficult transition: moving from institutional settings into residential communities.

The MHA was inspired to launch the program by a 1973 article in *Women's Day* magazine that described an "Adopt-a-Patient" program in Indianapolis that encouraged volunteers to visit people in local mental health institutions. Later that year, the MHA introduced the program in Rochester and hired a part-time director to run it. In 1975, Bernice Skirboll was recruited to head the program, which she renamed Compeer "to reduce the stigma the original program's name evoked," Skirboll explained. She "grew" the original program from a group of six volunteers to one involving 1,000 people from the community who receive training and are matched with people in the area who benefit from local mental health care services. They build friendships, conduct projects, take trips and enhance each others' lives.

In 1982, Compeer was named a model program by the National Institute for Mental Health, which awarded it a program dissemination grant. That year, Compeer became an incorporated entity while continuing its solidarity with the MHA. Over the years, more than 100 MHAs and other mental health organizations in 30 states, Canada and Australia have become Compeer affiliates, paying annual membership dues to replicate the programs locally with the support of Compeer's national office.

And Compeer's reach is broad. The St. Vincent DePaul Society, a nonprofit mental health care organization, runs three Compeer programs in Australia. When Skirboll visited program organizers "down under," volunteers wearing t-shirts adorned with the Compeer logo greeted her, holding high the organizational banner. "It was a great illustration of how easy it is to replicate the program, even half a world away—and it also reminded me of the strong and universal need there is for grassroots outreach programs like Compeer," Skirboll said.

One doesn't have to venture far to run into Compeer participants—and boosters. While seeking support for its Compeer program, MHA of Hamilton County (Iowa) used a one-year \$25,000 Faith in Action grant from the Robert

Wood Johnson Foundation to involve various religious congregations and other groups to help people who need social services. Following the Compeer model, the MHA arranged a system to match consumers with volunteers in the community who agreed to meet and spend time with each other on a regular basis. Over time, the program expanded to offer group, telephone and pen pal matches in addition to one-on-one matches. "Compeer is a great networking program that reduces the stigma associated with mental illness and developmental disabilities and helps foster community relationships," explained Sara Worthen, who began managing the program for the county in 2001. When the MHA's Faith in Action funding and involvement with Compeer ended, the county merged the program with its "Clubhouse" drop-in center.

The MHA of Licking County, Ohio, launched its own Compeer program in 1995 and plans to spend the \$35,000, 30-month-long Faith in Action grant it received in January 2003 to expand it. "We've combined the money with United Way funding and county mental health tax dollars to add hours to the program's coordinator's position, and we recruited enough volunteers initially to form 27 matches and we hope to increase that number to 50 by the end of the year," explained MHA associate director Cheryl Holton.

We feel that working with faith communities will increase the number of volunteers we are able to recruit and help decrease the stigma associated with mental illness, which, of course, is what Compeer is all about," she said

The MHA of Rochester/Monroe County will honor Skirboll for her years of dedication to Compeer at a tribute luncheon to be held on September 29. But the story doesn't end there. Skirboll hopes to find the resources to recruit more affiliates and is always in search of more funding from government and nonprofit sources, more volunteers and more success in fighting the stigma so many people with mental illnesses encounter.

Compeer affiliates receive expertise, support and educational and public relations materials from Compeer's national office, and are encouraged to attend Compeer's annual conference. Mental health care organizations that would like more information on starting their own Compeer programs should call 800-836-0475 or visit <http://www.Compeer.org>. 

# NMHA's Annual Conference to Focus on America's Mental Health Crisis: Finding Solutions Together

Exciting Speakers and New Tracks Slated for This Year's Event

Attendees of NMHA's 2003 Annual Conference will hear from a variety of exciting speakers, including Olympic athlete Derek Adkins who will describe his challenging recovery from mental illness, and Michael Hogan, chairman of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, who will deliver the panel's groundbreaking findings.

Adkins, Olympic Gold Medalist in the 400-meter hurdle competition, was diagnosed with severe depression accompanied by episodes of suicide ideation in 1996, the year he won his gold medal. In his keynote address, Adkins will discuss his treatment and remarkable recovery, which he describes in a book about his experiences. Adkins, a celebrity spokesman on depression and recovery for the MHA of Nassau County, N.Y., has a degree in engineering

and is preparing for the ministry while training to compete in 2004 Olympic trials.

Conference participants won't want to miss Michael Hogan, who will discuss the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health's

findings on the state of the nation's mental health care system—the first such study to be conducted in 25 years. Hogan will provide an expert—and insider's—view of the commission's work, which could have a major impact on the evolution of mental health care in this nation.

## Advocacy Day

On Advocacy day, attendees will visit congressional offices on Capitol Hill to educate legislators about key mental health issues and discuss their constituents' priorities. These visits provide advocates with an invaluable opportunity to make their views and concerns known to key policymakers, and influence the nation's health care agenda. For more information and to schedule visits with your legislators, contact Allison Kenyon at 202-675-8381.

## New This Year!

In addition, through a wide range of workshops, conference participants will examine and discuss ways to find solutions to America's mental health crisis. National and state fiscal

shortfalls, the threat of terrorism, and a national mental health system in serious need of repair pose huge challenges for us all. Attendees can exchange their views and lessons learned on a variety of topics, which for the first time will be divided into five functional tracks: advocacy, fundraising, organizational capacity-building, public education, and services and support for families and communities. These tracks will allow participants to focus on one area of expertise or a new discipline.

In addition, a special plenary will be devoted to a discussion of the President's New Freedom Commission's Subcommittee on Cultural Competence report, which suggests ways to eliminate disparities in mental health care for people of diverse backgrounds.

Also featured this year will be a pre-conference training institute, titled "Moving Toward Cultural Competence," through which attendees will explore ways to increase cultural competence in the field and improve cross-cultural communication, develop coalitions to break down cultural barriers, and address cultural bias. 

For complete online information and to register and make hotel reservations, visit <http://www.nmha.org/annualconference> where you can register for workshops, pay your registration fee by credit card, make your hotel reservation and get conference updates.

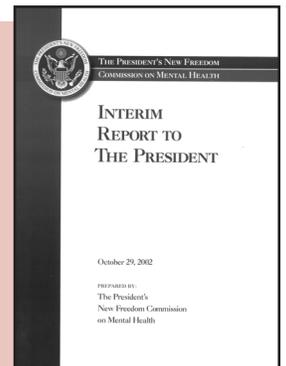
## President's Commission Issues Interim Report On Nation's Mental Health System

America's mental health system is "in shambles," due in part to our nation's failure to make mental health, suicide prevention and the needs of people with mental illnesses priorities, according to the

*Interim Report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health*, released in October.

NMHA applauds the commission for boldly identifying these problems and for highlighting the value of selected school- and community-based prevention programs.

Until the final report is released, advocates can refer to the interim report to foster support for key mental health services consumers need. The report is available for downloading by going to NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>, clicking on "All News Releases" and scrolling down to the link "November 4, 2002."



## New Book Teaches Families How to Deal With Parental Depression

For years, William Beardslee, M.D., has been waging a campaign to shed light on the devastating effect that adult depression, which often goes underdiagnosed and under-treated, can have on so many American families.

As psychiatrist-in-chief and chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Boston's Children's Hospital, Beardslee has spent his career fighting the stigma that people who have depression confront, and helping parents who are depressed protect their children's mental health.

He has also drawn on his own experience to wage this battle—the loss of his sister whose years of fighting depression ended when she took her own life. In his book, *Out of the Darkened Room*, Beardslee says that it's important for parents who have depression to explain to their children what they're going through. He and his research team also encourage children to express their feelings, discuss how they believe they're being affected and ask to learn more about the family's ordeal.

Beardslee describes and quotes families who have dealt with this illness to illustrate the strategies they adopted to overcome depression's potentially adverse effects on families and the lessons they learned in the process.

"Learning to talk together and make sense of the illness together . . . reknitting the sense of continuity, emerged as the heart of our approach to preventing depression in children," said Beardslee. (*Out of the Darkened Room*, 2002, Little, Brown, is available for purchase at major online bookstores.)

## NMHA's mpower Initiative Forms Youth Leadership Council

Stay tuned for an exciting new initiative that will harness the power of music to empower America's youth to learn about mental health and substance abuse—and to get help, when needed, and get better. NMHA will launch this new program, called **mpower: musicians for mental health** later this year with support from artists and leaders in the music industry.

### Youth Reach Out to Youth

Young adult and teen participation is a key aspect of the mpower campaign. With the help of NMHA affiliates and board members, the campaign is pulling together a diverse group of dynamic teens and young adults to serve on mpower's Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The YLC will help shape the campaign's messages and activities, and work with NMHA to educate their peers about mental illness and mental health care. Some YLC members are living with a mental illness and have experienced the horrible stigma of mental illness firsthand. A few have lost a loved one to suicide. All share a passion for music, and believe in its power to carry a positive message of hope and recovery.

### YLC's Energy and Drive Fuels mpower Campaign

The new council's energy and commitment have already become **mpower's** driving force. One council member, 25-year-old Chris Torres, has overcome many obstacles in his life, having been diagnosed with autism, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. He enjoys creating artwork, which has earned him recognition and the opportunity to display his sketches in Florida; he also has a part-time job. When asked why he joined the council, Torres explained, "I believe **mpower** will accomplish its mission in helping teens and young adults, because I'll do whatever it takes to do my part in helping teens find their way in life." 🎨

NMHA will continue to identify young adults and teens throughout the year who will be invited to join **mpower's** Youth Leadership Council. For more information about the YLC or **mpower**, contact Michelle Pruett, director, Public Education at 703-838-7538, or Shela Halper, managing director, mpower at 703-838-7533.

### Introducing mpower's Youth Leadership Council:

- Michael Auerbach, 18, Denver, CO
- Farah Krupp, 25, State College, PA
- Courtney Nicolaisen, 21, Orinda, CA
- Leslie Schwaninger, 21, Easton, MD
- Haley Stephens, 17, Blacksburg, VA
- Christopher Torres, 25, Jupiter, FL
- Scooter Vineburg, 28, Boston, MA
- Jordan Woody, 15, Fort Worth, TX



[www.nmha.org/mpower](http://www.nmha.org/mpower)

## Is United Way the Only Way?

Most nonprofit organizations receive grants from their local United Way offices. But many grant seekers don't realize that they can increase the amount of outside funding they receive by also registering and working with other organizations that specialize in raising funds for local, and national, charities.

These groups, sometimes called federations, provide an easy way to support one or more charities through workplace giving campaigns. Participating employees simply indicate an amount they wish to have deducted from each paycheck, which is donated to the charity they designate.

Donors also benefit through:

- Increased trust they feel toward the charities they support, which must register annually to participate and meet strict guidelines.
- Their ability to give more through payroll deductions by giving a small amount biweekly instead of writing one check at the end of the year.
- Simplified tax reporting because a payroll deduction is an efficient way to track charitable giving for tax purposes.

The charities involved in these campaigns also benefit from:

- Steady, reliable year-round income sources.
- Reductions in fundraising costs, which allows them to focus more efforts on programs and services.
- Broader community outreach.

MHAs and other nonprofits can also take several easy steps to increase community participation and enhance their organizations' visibility by attending as many charity fairs as possible, volunteering to speak on mental health topics at local community events, and informing current donors how they can participate in workplace giving campaigns.

The following organizations can help nonprofits increase their revenue through workplace giving:

- Community Health Charities at <http://www.healthcharities.org>
- Combined Federal Campaign/U.S. Office of Personnel Management at <http://www.opm.gov/cfc>
- Local Independent Charities of America at <http://www.lic.org>.

## NMHA Seeks to Help Parents Talk With Their Kids About Sexual Orientation and Prejudice

More than three-fourths of teens in the United States (78 percent) report that their peers who are gay or are believed to be gay are teased or bullied at school or in their communities. Nine of 10 teens (93 percent) say they hear other teens use negative words to describe people who are gay at least periodically; 51 percent say they hear such terms used on a daily basis.

These are a few of the findings from a comprehensive survey of teens NMHA sponsored last year as part of its nationwide "What Does Gay Mean?" campaign, which is designed to shed light on discrimination against gay adolescents and to help parents learn how to talk with their kids to eliminate such prejudice.

Anti-gay prejudice affects society more pervasively than many people realize. Three of four young people who were harassed by anti-gay bullies were heterosexual, the Safe Schools Coalition, a national coalition of public and private organizations devoted to supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, reported in 1996. It's virtually impossible to find a gay adolescent who hasn't been harassed. One in every three gay kids is subject to abuse, and one in six is beaten badly enough to need medical attention.

"When they're bullied, gay youth and those who are thought by their peers to be gay, are at increased risk of developing depression," Michael Faenza, NMHA's president and CEO pointed out. "Schools, community groups and parents share the responsibility of preventing and stopping prejudice."

The program's centerpiece is the *What Does Gay Mean?* brochure, written by Lynn Ponton, M.D., one of the country's foremost experts on adolescent sexuality. It provides tips on how to talk to children of various ages about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, and offers resources that will help them discuss sexual orientation issues in ways that are consistent with their values.

*NMHA's What Does Gay Mean? anti-gay bullying initiative is supported by the David Bohnett Foundation, the Columbia Foundation, the R. Gwin Follis Foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, the Horizons Foundation, Stephanie and Carter McClelland, SBC Communications and the Tides Foundation. To obtain copies of the What Does Gay Mean? brochure, call 800-969-NMHA (6642) or download a copy from NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>.*



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*The Bell* is published by the National Mental Health Association, which works with more than 340 affiliates nationwide to promote mental health, prevent mental disorders and achieve victory over mental illnesses through advocacy, education, research and service.

To join NMHA and receive *The Bell*, visit NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org> or call 800-969-NMHA (6642).

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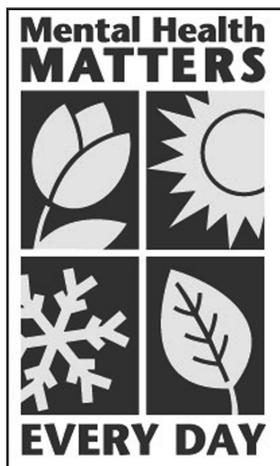


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## May is Mental Health Month!

Raise public awareness this May about the importance of mental health through one of the nation's most recognized health campaigns—Mental



Health Month. This year's Mental Health Month guide, under the theme Mental Health Matters—Every Day, contains creative suggestions you can use to reach out to the media, employers, policymakers and your entire community in May and throughout the year. New workplace materials will help you show employers how they can help support their staff's mental health while increasing morale,

productivity and the organization's bottom line. Selected pieces are available free of charge at <http://www.nmha.org>. To order the full kit, call NMHA at 800-969-NMHA (6642).

## NMHA Rated a Top Charity . . . Once Again

NMHA has for the fifth year in a row earned top ratings for 2002 from national news, financial and philanthropic publications and organizations for its efficient financial management, and for the high percentage of income it devotes to its programs and services. *Worth*, *Forbes*, *SmartMoney*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *The Nonprofit Times*, *Charity Navigator* and the *American Institute for Philanthropy* all saluted NMHA for its effective use of the generous support it receives. In addition, Newsweek magazine listed NMHA as one of the top five charities in the United States.

To learn more or to find out how you can support NMHA or your local MHA, contact [giftoffice@nmha.org](mailto:giftoffice@nmha.org) or 703-838-7542.