

Fight the Stigma Around Serious Mental Health Conditions

Conversations around mental health have become more normalized in recent years. In 2020, 14.2 million U.S. adults 18 or older were living with serious mental health conditions (SMHCs).

SMHCs are one or more mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder(s) resulting in serious functional impairment, which substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities¹.

SMHCs include, but are not limited to:

- Major Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia and other Schizoaffective Disorders

A major barrier preventing people with SMHCs from getting treatment is stigmatizing language, beliefs, and behavior. You can remove obstacles to accessing mental health care and services by not using stigmatizing language.

Denver is behind in local mental health access and treatment.

In 2019, 16% of Denver residents reported needing mental health care but not receiving it. Of those who didn't receive care, more than one-third said they were uncomfortable talking about personal issues as a reason². Reduce mental health stigma by increasing your awareness around hurtful language.

<i>Where does stigma about mental health come from?</i>	<i>What is stigmatizing language for SMHCs?</i>	<i>How do we fight mental health stigma?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and loved ones • Employers • Law enforcement • Medical providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording that diminishes the significance of a SMHC, or devalues a person who possesses one regardless of intent, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Things could be worse" • Using mental health as a descriptor like calling someone "a paranoid schizophrenic" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share stories • Educate yourself and your communities • Watch your language • Treat SMHCs like you do any serious physical health condition

Stigma can impact employment opportunities and social dynamics, and prevent people with SMHCs from receiving equitable treatment.

Thinking about the impact your words can have can go far in ensuring that stigma isn't perpetuated. Try offering words of support, sympathy, and encouragement.

Spread the word and help us fight stigma in Colorado. Learn more and find resources at www.DenverGov.org/WhatYouSayMatters.

1 NIMH: [https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness#:~:text=Serious%20mental%20illness%20\(SMI\)%20is,or%20more%20major%20life%20activities](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness#:~:text=Serious%20mental%20illness%20(SMI)%20is,or%20more%20major%20life%20activities)

2 Colorado Health Institute: <https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/research/colorado-health-access-survey-2019>