



[Home](#) > [National Health Ministries](#) > [Cong. Health Ministry](#) > [Serious Mental Illness](#)

## Serious Mental Illness

The Office of National Health Ministries seeks to enable and empower individual Presbyterians, congregations, presbyteries and synods to understand serious mental illness and to be in ministry with persons and their families affected by this illness. We support these communities by creating educational resources, the providing of training programs, and consultants. Start up grants available.

Serious Mental Illness is the term used for a group of disorders causing a severe disturbance in thinking, feeling and/or relating. The result is a substantially diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life. Today in this country, approximately one in four people, in all age groups are touched by this illness.

### Why Mental Illness Awareness?

- ❖ More than 35 million people suffer from some form of mental illness in the United States.
- ❖ Nationally, it is estimated that one in 20 youth, or as many as three million young people, may have an emotional disorder.
- ❖ At least one in four families copes with the challenges brought on by a family member experiencing mental illness.
- ❖ Effective treatments are available even for the most serious mental illnesses — whether it's an anxiety disorder, severe depression or schizophrenia.
- ❖ More hospital beds are occupied by people with serious mental illness than by persons with cancer, lung disease and heart disease combined.
- ❖ Two-thirds of children with mental health needs are not getting the help they need.
- ❖ Two decades of studies have consistently shown that approximately 40 percent of persons seeking professional help with mental disorders turn first to clergy.
- ❖ The church is called to seek justice, offer compassion and hospitality, and engage in reconciling ministry with persons with mental illnesses as well as others in need.

[TOP](#) ▲

## Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Policy

[PC\(USA\) Home](#)

Search PC(USA)

[GO!](#)

[Home](#)

[News and Training](#)

[Advocacy](#)

[Congregational Health Ministries](#)

[Health Information](#)

[Living Longer - Feeling Better](#)

[Resources](#)

[E-Community Connections](#)

[Staff](#)

[Parish Nursing](#)



The need to address chronic mental illness is urgent. The 1988 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a report and resolution which called the church to ministry and mission with those persons affected by serious mental illness including family, friends and professionals. The report:



- ❖ acknowledged that the religious community is in a unique position to be the bridge between clinical settings and life in the home community and to offer support to the diversity of persons whose lives are touched by mental illness
- ❖ urged pastors and congregations to develop ways of inclusion
- ❖ urged that congregations cherish the presence of all in the community of faith as it worships, studies, gives, grows and heals together
- ❖ encouraged the church to learn more about mental illness and
- ❖ encouraged the church to seek new ways to respond to those with severe mental illness and their families.

A more complete summary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy is found in the [policy](#) section. The Church and Mental Illness, report and resolution from the 200th General Assembly (1988) about the church's call to ministry and mission with those affected by serious mental illness.

[\[Learn more\]](#)

TOP ▲

---

## Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network

Some of the work of National Health Ministries occurs in cooperation with Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network (PSMIN), a network of Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA).

Presbyterian Serious Mental Illness Network (PSMIN) is a network of PHEWA. In cooperation with the Office of Health Ministries, USA, it provides resources and training for congregations and middle governing bodies for mental illness ministries and support for people and families affected by mental illness. Membership information is available by contacting:

### **[PHEWA](#)**

#### **Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association**

100 Witherspoon St., Room 3041  
Louisville, KY 40202  
Tel: (888) 728-7228 x5800

TOP ▲

---

## Local Congregational Ministries

Many Presbyterian congregations use the serious mental illness awareness education materials throughout the year and celebrate a Mental Illness Awareness Sunday once a year. In addition, some congregations have discovered the need to create special ministries with people with mental illness and their families.

## Presbyterian Mental Illness Awareness Week

Congregations are encouraged to establish a special time to observe Presbyterian Mental Illness Awareness. Suggested times coincide with several nationwide and community awareness events including an awareness week in October and a mental health month in May. Look for the spring mailing from Health Ministries, USA which includes a sample poster for Presbyterian Mental Illness Awareness. The mailing is sent to all congregations, congregational ministry leaders, women's advocacy leaders, most Presbyterian campus ministries and Christian education program leaders.

## Suggestions for Observing Presbyterian Mental Illness Awareness Week:

1. Establish a special Sunday morning worship service around mental illness.
2. Order Mental Illness Awareness bulletin inserts. (Click [here](#) to see Resource section).
3. Order "[The Congregation: A Community of Care and Healing \(Mental Illness Awareness Resource\)](#)" for worship, study and sermon ideas.
4. Use the video "[Honest Talk About Serious Mental Illness \(for Older Youth\)](#)" to assist adults as well as youth in becoming aware about the facts and challenges of serious mental illness.
5. Provide presentations by persons and/or families affected by mental illness.
6. Encourage your congregation or presbytery to form a Mental Illness Task Force to assist members in understanding mental illness.
7. Create a mental health and mental illness section in your church library.

TOP ▲

---

## Resources

Resources created to educate about mental illness and to be in ministry with those affected by mental illness include Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy, video and curriculum for older youth, educational tools for the congregation and worship resources. Please refer to the [resource section](#) for more details about these resources.

### **My Christmas Tree is Down and So Am I:**

Post-Holiday Blahs, Winter Blues, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and

Depression. Learn about coping with winter blues and post-holiday blahs, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), depression and how congregations can be supportive. [[Read article](#)]

TOP ▲

---

## The Religious Community and Mental Illness: How a Congregation Can Respond

Clergy and congregations are asked to respond to a variety of community needs. These needs often focus on persons living within the neighborhood of the congregation. In many cases an effective response can be made. This is as true for the needs of those who have a mental illness as it is for others in need. The following are some suggested ways to respond:

### **Members of the congregation can be a friend.**

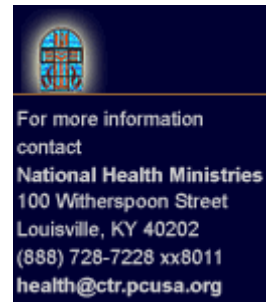
Long- term mental illness tends to isolate people. Be a friend to those who may have no other friends or support systems.

- ❖ Be accepting, friendly, understanding, and genuine.
- ❖ Write, send a card.
- ❖ Telephone to keep in contact.
- ❖ Talk with the person, listen to the person.
- ❖ Make visitations.
- ❖ Encourage the person to work with their strengths, with their gifts.
- ❖ Help set realistic goals.
- ❖ Be a resource for information and referral.
- ❖ Avoid implying that if the person can "get things right with God" or "confess" that the person will be cured

### **Members of the congregation can let the person know he/she is not alone.**

- ❖ Welcome the person into the church community.
- ❖ Recognize the need for spiritual healing, without focusing on the "cure" for the illness.
- ❖ Always reassure the person that God loves and cares for him/her.
- ❖ Remember that this is not a punishment from God or caused by demons or the devil.
- ❖ Encourage the person to join a support group, social club and/or advocacy group.

**The congregation can offer opportunities to integrate the person into the church community.**



- ❖ Holiday programs are nice. More important is including the person in the church's year round activities, outings, interest groups, etc.
- ❖ Encourage the person to volunteer at the church. Make tasks you ask of the person constructive and meaningful. These could include doing a reading, preparing the place of worship, helping with the coffee hour, helping with the bulletin or newsletter.

**The congregation can open the church to:**

- ❖ Hosting a group of people who have a mental illness from a community facility,
- ❖ Sponsoring a support group for persons who are ill or family members,
- ❖ Sponsoring a social club or drop-in center,
- ❖ Offering employment, such as secretarial, using artistic talents, janitorial, maintenance, food preparation, etc.,
- ❖ Initiating a visitation program.

**Members of a congregation can educate themselves and others by:**

- ❖ Encouraging clergy, lay staff and congregations to learn about mental illness,
- ❖ Raising awareness in the congregation about mental illness in a sermon, bulletin or newsletter,
- ❖ Adding materials about mental illness to the congregation's library,
- ❖ Encouraging heightened awareness about mental illness beyond its congregation by writing a letter to the editor or an article for a regional or national denominational publication,
- ❖ Encouraging the denomination's area wide, regional or national structure to be responsive to the needs of persons with a mental illness and their families.

**Members of a congregation can advocate for persons with a mental illness in the community by:**

- ❖ Being willing to work with other congregations in the community to improve the quality of life for persons with a mental illness and their families,
- ❖ Supporting efforts to obtain appropriate housing and jobs.
- ❖ Not letting false, stigmatizing statements about mental illness go unchallenged,
- ❖ Objecting in writing or by telephone when media and public events stigmatize people who have a mental illness,
- ❖ Encouraging the denomination's legislative and advocacy groups to support increased budgets for research, creation of appropriate

housing, and community services.

For more information on serious mental illness and ways that congregations, pastors, families and individuals can support those with serious mental illness, as well as worship resources, please consult [The Congregation: A Community of Care and Healing, Mental Illness Awareness Resources](#).

TOP ▲

---

## Other Mental Illness Organizations and Resources

### National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Self-help, support, and advocacy organization for consumers, families and friends of people with serious brain disorders. NAMI is a leader of Mental Health Awareness Week in October. Call 800-950-NAMI for information or referral to a group in your area. Or, [visit their Web site](#).

---

### National Mental Health Consumers Association

An advocacy and self-help organization founded by and for consumers of mental health services. Write P.O. Box 1166, Madison, WI 53701. Or, [visit their Web site](#).

---

### Mental Health Studios

An interactive CD-ROM created by Pathways to Promise and which may be on loan from National Health Ministries (888-728-7228, ext. 8011). Gives deeper understanding of different illnesses.

---

### National Institute for Mental Health

Division of Communications provides educational literature, videotapes, posters and public service announcements on many topics. Call (301) 443-3783 for a list. Or, [visit their Web site](#).

TOP ▲

---

[Who We Are](#) | [Congregations](#) | [News and Events](#) | [Ministry and Vocations](#) | [Resources/Publications](#)  
[Giving and Funding](#) | [US and World Mission](#) | [Search pcusa.org](#) | [Home](#)

Contributed by PC(USA)

---

Copyright Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). All Rights Reserved.