

# CALIFORNIA STRATEGIC PLAN ON REDUCING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

## *Excerpt: Part 3*



### **Blueprint**

**T**he California Strategic Plan on Reducing Mental Health Stigma and Discrimination (2009) serves as a blueprint for a broad spectrum of individuals, organizations, and systems to take action. The Plan is organized by three levels of focus for reducing mental health stigma and discrimination:

- strategic directions
- recommended actions
- next steps

The Plan offers a comprehensive range of strategies, starting from changing attitudes, beliefs, and practices; to promoting awareness and accountability; to enforcing the laws; and to increasing knowledge through research and evaluation. The programs and services generated from this Plan must go beyond traditional approaches. A community-tailored approach is essential and will require community-wide strategies and responsive organizational and environmental policies and practices. State and local partners spanning multiple disciplines and settings must work together to create the comprehensive multilevel approach needed to make a difference in California.

The four strategic directions are broad levels of focus that serve as the central aim for more specific

### **Core Principles**

**Core Principle 1:** Implement culturally and linguistically competent strategies and programs that reduce disparities and reflect the values and beliefs of diverse populations.

**Core Principle 2:** Employ a life-span approach to effectively meet the needs of different age groups.

**Core Principle 3:** Involve a broad spectrum of the public, including mental health consumers, family members, friends, caregivers, mental health and allied professionals, advocates, and agencies that interact with children, youth, adults, and older adults.

**Core Principle 4:** Address all types of stigma and anti-discrimination laws.

**Core Principle 5:** Build upon promising practices and proven models.

**Core Principle 6:** Recognize that individuals experiencing mental health challenges are resilient and have the capacity for recovery, and that the best results in treatment for those experiencing mental health challenges come from voluntary programs that offer choice and options.

For a full report, visit the California Department of Mental Health's website at:  
<http://www.dmh.ca.gov/PEIStatewideProjects/StrategicPlan.asp>

recommended actions. These 26 recommended actions are not an exhaustive list, but they have emerged as priorities at this point in time to reduce mental health stigma and discrimination and its impact on individuals, families, and communities throughout California. These recommendations are grounded in the data and evidence presented in the Plan and were refined through the course of many rich discussions of the California Mental Health Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Advisory Committee and through public workshops.

The next steps, identified as bullets, are specific ways that these recommended actions can be implemented “on the ground,” whether at the state, regional, or local level. These strategic directions, recommended actions, and next steps lay a foundation for a comprehensive approach to reducing mental health stigma and discrimination. All aspects of this work must incorporate the six core principles developed by the Advisory Committee.

**Strategic Direction 1: *Creating a supportive environment for all consumers and those at risk for mental health challenges, family members, and the community at large by establishing social norms that recognize mental health is integral to everyone’s well-being.***

### **1.1 Create widespread understanding and recognition within the public and across all systems that:**

- People at different points in their lives experience different degrees of mental health from wellness to crisis.
- Persons living with mental health challenges have resilience and the capacity for recovery.
- Form a local coalition of diverse representatives, including those with mental health challenges, to launch a community action plan to educate the public on mental health challenges and wellness and recovery models.
- Develop messages and relevant materials for the public that explain mental health challenges and promote social inclusion.
- Change consumer information, current medical curricula, and the practice of mental health diagnoses and treatment to reflect and reinforce recovery, resilience, and wellness.
- Assess existing print and electronic media on mental health challenges and emotional disturbances to reflect recovery, resilience, and wellness.

- Simplify and promote available, reliable web resources that promote non-stigmatizing mental health information.
- Rely on mental health consumers and family members to raise awareness of the importance of mental health.
- Identify how everyday language reinforces stigma and discrimination toward those living with mental health challenges and substitute those words with non-stigmatizing and non-discriminatory language.
- Confront stigmatizing messages from individuals, groups, organizations, and the media.

### **1.2 Prevent the development of mental health stigma, stereotyping, and discrimination.**

- Develop and launch a community-wide effort to promote children’s healthy social and emotional development.
- Utilize existing children and youth organizations to assess and enhance educational programs for parents, early childhood educators, and caregivers on children’s social and emotional development.

### **1.3 Create opportunities and forums for strengthening relationships and understanding between consumers, family members, and the greater community.**

- Utilize established community networks to sponsor dialogues among consumers, family members, and the larger public about mental health issues.
- Increase direct contact and dialogues between consumers, family members, and representatives of systems, institutions, and organizations that affect the lives of those living with mental health challenges.
- Create forums with specific organizations to create change, such as mental health providers, educational system personnel, medical professionals, the media, employers, and landlords.
- Create roundtables in local communities to focus efforts on specific populations, such as older adults, foster children, or veterans, or a specific topic, such as housing, employers or law enforcement officials.

### **1.4 Reduce self-stigma of individuals living with mental health challenges and stigma by association for their family members.**

- Assess, develop when necessary, and widely disseminate educational and training materials on how to combat mental health self-stigma.
- Adapt educational and training materials to local community needs.

- Encourage mental health providers to assess their procedures to identify and eliminate any contributory actions to consumer self-stigma.
- Support education and training for veterans and their families for their effective and healthy reintegration from active duty to the community.

**1.5 Recognize peer-run and peer-led programs as an important means for reducing stigma.**

- Assess, develop, and disseminate information on peer-run and peer-led programs and social support models.
- Work with local and statewide organizations to establish peer-to-peer support as a vital component of mental health treatment.
- Develop local speakers' bureaus, presentations, and forums that feature peers who are successfully dealing with mental health challenges.
- Promote education and skill-based training for consumer and family empowerment to address such topics as cultural competence, communication, and advocacy.
- Utilize technology and other advancements to support groups or individuals who are geographically or emotionally isolated.
- Enhance the skills of peers to be more effective trainers of mental health staff to better address client and family members' culture in their recovery and wellness services and other relevant topics.
- Create training and advancement opportunities to allow individuals the ability to implement peer-run and peer-led programs.
- Develop a peer-to-peer network of support for veterans in higher education and within communities.

**1.6 Address the multiple stigmas of persons living with mental health challenges who are also faced with discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical disability, or other societal biases.**

- Disseminate successful models that have been identified by different cultural communities.
- Educate substance abuse providers and mental health providers to reduce the effects of stigma for individuals encountering co-occurring disorders.
- Work with racial and ethnic community groups to ensure that models and programs are culturally and linguistically competent and eliminate stigmatizing barriers.

**1.7 Provide increased support for those closely involved with the lives of individuals facing mental health challenges.**

- Apply innovative information technologies so that parents and caregivers may easily obtain accurate information, guidance and referrals to seek needed services.
- Identify non-traditional community locations (churches, youth programs, and community centers), to distribute information on available mental health resources.

**1.8 Reduce the effects of stigma with a strength-based approach to assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, and interventions.**

- Train providers to assess and develop individualized mental health plans that are strength-based.
- Educate families, youth, peers, and adults in the concepts of resiliency, recovery, hope, and healing.
- Provide training on the strength-based approach to child protective service systems, juvenile and adult justice systems, law enforcement, and education.
- Promote opportunities for self expression through the arts and other outlets.
- Address the stigma that comes from residing in a facility by providing increased support, education, training, and guidance to facility residents and staff, county workers, family members, caregivers, and others closely involved in the lives of individuals in mental health facilities.

**Strategic Direction 2: Promoting awareness, accountability, and changes in values, practices, policies, and procedures across and within systems and organizations that encourage the respect and rights of people identified with mental health challenges.**

**2.1 Initiate systematic reviews to identify and address stigmatizing and discriminatory language, behaviors, practices, and policies.**

- Explore, understand, and address how policies and procedures impact individuals living with mental health challenges.
- Conduct a review of one or more of the following state or local systems and programs to identify behaviors, policies, and practices for areas of improvement: pre K-12 education, community

college and university, medical system, mental health system, media, and law enforcement. The local community would disseminate its findings.

- Support ethnic diversity and cultural competency training among mental health providers and advocacy groups.
- Train mental health staff on stigma and discrimination reduction.
- Support training for mental health staff that educates on the unique cultural aspects of working with veterans.

## **2.2 Establish developmentally appropriate prevention, recovery, and wellness programs.**

- Work with the county mental health departments and other mental health providers to ensure that programs and facilities are provided and tailored to individuals of different ages.

## **2.3 Ensure that mental health services are offered in non-traditional, non-stigmatizing community and school sites.**

- Develop and disseminate effective treatment practices for those with multiple stigmas so the practices are widely available through the medical and mental health systems.
- Address the public resource distribution of mental health services to best meet the service needs of populations experiencing multiple stigmas.
- Co-locate primary care and mental health services and staff to better meet the needs of people with mental health challenges through an integrated approach.
- Utilize innovative technologies, including mass media and the Internet to reach individuals and communities.
- Increase the use of non-traditional cultural approaches.

## **2.4 Create a more holistic and integrated approach to physical health and mental wellness by:**

- Promoting integrative delivery models of mental health, primary health care, and social services.
- Achieving parity between medical and mental health services in terms of coverage and financing.
- Utilizing spirituality and faith-based practices as tools for wellness and recovery.
- Sponsor local and statewide programs to support medical practitioners to routinely screen individuals for mental health risk factors and conditions as part

of routine care and provide appropriate referrals.

- Assist medical care practitioners in detecting and appropriately treating common problems, such as depression; anxiety; alcohol and substance abuse; and childhood social, emotional, and developmental problems.
- Screen for and address both mental and medical needs of individuals entering a mental health facility.
- Convene an expert panel to discuss financial strategies for reducing stigma associated with the mental health and medical health care systems. Topics of discussion could include: the Mental Health Parity Act; same day visit reimbursement for community health centers and federally qualified health centers; the medical necessity criteria under Managed Care Mental Health for County Mental Health; preauthorization requirements for mental health services; and MediCal reimbursement for medical practitioners who provide mental health screenings.
- Train providers on the value of spirituality in the wellness and recovery process and the contributions faith-based and other non-traditional providers make.
- Establish and/or enhance regional, inter-faith-based networks throughout California to serve as a resource to practitioners and consumers on faith-based approaches and methodologies.
- Create a category on existing or future resource sites to address faith-based best practices and models covering prevention through recovery services.
- Utilize the multi-faith-based network to provide insight on different beliefs and values that can inform treatment approaches and or methodologies.

## **2.5 Promote the dignity and safety of mental health consumers and their family members by training and educating law enforcement, first responders, other medical personnel, and the community at large to reduce stigmatizing attitudes and discriminating behavior by:**

- Educating the broader public about community resources available to assist with mental health-related crises.
- Utilizing informed consent as a means to ensure voluntary choice.
- Preparing and equipping law enforcement to better respond to the needs of individuals in mental health-related crisis.

- Eliminating a perceived need for the use of force and forced compliancy through these and other systematic alternatives referred to earlier in this Plan.
- Support the expansion of local response programs to better meet the needs of individuals with mental health challenges, (crisis residential programs, advanced directives, and integrated community services teams).
- Support and provide crisis intervention programs (crisis intervention training) that provides information to first responders about alternative sites and transport methods for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis to minimize the use of 5150s and criminal incarceration.
- Develop and widely disseminate information on de-escalation approaches and techniques (such as peer involvement) for emergency room personnel, law enforcement (including municipal, county, state, and federal), homeless shelter staff, and mental health providers.
- Provide increased support, education, training, and guidance to in-patient care staff to eliminate the use of seclusion and physical or pharmaceutical restraint.
- Provide anti-stigma education and resources to individuals within a rural community who routinely come into contact with a wide range of people, (clergy, pharmacists, postal carriers, fire and police, school teachers, and those who deliver meals-on-wheels).
- Enhance the partnerships between consumers, family members, and law enforcement.
- Establish training requirements (mandatory continuing education in mental health issues for criminal justice professions that may have close contact with children and adults with mental health challenges).

## **2.6 Educate employers on the importance of mental health wellness for all employees.**

- Develop curriculum, training, Web sites, and guidebooks to educate employers on mental health development and literacy, the value of social inclusion, wellness, recovery and resilience, mental health community resources, and other customized topics relating to stigma and discrimination reduction. Involve mental health consumers in the development and delivery of trainings and other forms of educational outreach.

- Develop an educational campaign targeted to employers that emphasizes the financial benefits of a healthy workforce, both physically and mentally.
- Provide a comprehensive list of community resources and referrals that employers can make available to employees under emotional stress.
- Educate employers on their responsibilities to create work environments free of stigma and discrimination.

## **2.7 Expand opportunities for employment, professional development, upward mobility, retention, and success of mental health consumers in public, nonprofit, and private sector workplaces by enforcing current laws and challenging hiring biases.**

- Identify and disseminate strategies to promote the job-seeking skills and employment of individuals with mental health challenges.
- Create local opportunities for networking and relationship building among consumers, family members, regional business leaders, and other employers.
- Implement successful strategies to increase the employment, retention, and advancement of consumers and their family members within all levels of public and community mental health service delivery.
- Encourage employers to select employee health plans that offer mental health coverage.
- Encourage large employers to offer an employee assistance and counseling program as part of their benefit package.
- Review existing employment practices to identify and address any gaps that may exist.

## **2.8 Eliminate discriminatory barriers to better meet the housing needs of mental health consumers by:**

- Educating the general public, landlords, and local officials on the rights and housing needs of mental health consumers and their families/caretakers.
- Ensuring that all private and subsidized housing meet the nondiscrimination requirements of the Fair Housing Act and market; and operate their admissions procedures and manage their properties to ensure all applicants and tenants have equal opportunities to benefit from the housing.
- Encouraging supportive housing and other housing for individuals with disabilities to be well integrated throughout the community and accommodating of all levels of care.

- Promoting the provision of housing first as one means to eliminating discriminatory barriers.
- Promoting the accessibility of services in housing.
- Foster opportunities for consumers to meet, educate, interact with, and develop relationships with housing developers, neighborhood groups, planning commissions, and elected officials.
- Promote affordable housing for people experiencing mental health challenges.
- Promote the accessibility of supportive housing services for people with mental health challenges, (case management, health, mental health, vocational, and transportation).
- Create reintegration models for the discharge of people who are at risk of becoming homeless when leaving institutional settings, such as hospitals, juvenile halls/jails/prisons, foster care, and detoxification facilities.
- Identify and encourage the enforcement of current housing laws.
- Convene local workgroups that reflect the community's diversity and include housing developers, housing agencies, community organizations, mental health providers, and consumers and family members to develop strategies and recommendations to improve housing options for individuals living with mental health challenges.

## **2.9 Engage and educate the commercial, ethnic, public/community, and interactive media, as well as the entertainment industry, on:**

- Standards and guidelines to promote balanced and informed portrayals of people living with mental health challenges.
- Ways to serve as a resource for communicating accurate and non-stigmatizing information to the public on mental health issues and community resources.
- Create an anti-stigma campaign that highlights that everyone at different points in their lives may experience some degree of mental health impact from wellness to crisis.
- Develop tools to track and acknowledge print and electronic media sources for positive and balanced portrayals of individuals living with mental health challenges.
- Develop strategies to reward the balanced portrayals.
- Develop and disseminate reporting guidelines and materials designed for the media that provide

background materials on a range of mental health issues, including community resources and referral information useful to the public.

- Collaborate with higher education systems to provide information, resources, and referrals regarding mental health concerns.
- Work with the local and/or statewide media to develop mental health programming as part of the "May is Mental Health Month."
- Train consumers and family members to serve as spokespeople for mental health issues.

## **2.10 Promote and enhance initiatives, programs, and curricula to change school cultures and increase social inclusion and social acceptance.**

- Integrate mental health topics within the required health education and wellness programs and other relevant school-based prevention programs, e.g., violence prevention, anti-bullying.
- Encourage local mental health units to work with educational institutions to develop prevention and early intervention techniques as alternatives to fail-first initiatives for children and youth experiencing a mental health challenge.
- Include the reduction of stigma and discrimination against people with mental health challenges in annual comprehensive school safety plans to provide and maintain a high level of school safety.
- Encourage school attendance review boards (SARB) to include a mental health representative when meeting with students who have exhausted the resources of their school.
- Develop support groups and systems for children and siblings of consumers experiencing mental health challenges.
- Work with students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and school superintendents to implement school programs and policies that promote social inclusion.
- Establish training programs for teachers (preschool to higher education) to work more effectively with student mental health.
- Support greater special accommodations for individuals experiencing a mental health challenge who might not fall under educational guidelines for learning disabilities.
- Determine successful approaches and methods for educating health profession students about stigma and discrimination, e.g., sensitivity training, and stigma and discrimination awareness.

**Strategic Directions #3: Upholding and advancing federal and state laws to identify and eliminate discriminatory policies and practices.**

**3.1 Increase awareness and understanding of existing laws and regulations that protect individuals living with mental health challenges and their family members against discrimination.**

- Develop and widely disseminate user-friendly fact sheets with contact information for education and training purposes on applicable state and federal laws, regulations for school personnel and students, the housing industry, and public and private employers, as well as the medical and mental health systems.
- Review federal and state regulations for consistency that support funding mental health services in non-traditional settings to reduce stigma.

**3.2 Promote the compliance and enforcement of current anti-discrimination laws and regulations.**

- Establish periodic meetings with government and nonprofit civil rights enforcement agencies to discuss the adoption of compliance and enforcement campaigns.
- Develop local task forces or build upon existing structures, when available, including city and county legal counsels and diverse community members, to develop strategies for maximizing compliance with and enforcement of laws, regulations, and ordinances that protect individuals living with mental health challenges in areas including employment and public accommodation.
- Create opportunities for local task forces to communicate and coordinate strategies for promoting the compliance and enforcement of current anti-discrimination laws and regulations.
- Train staff at institutions of higher education, prisons, and public and private health facilities to ensure the understanding and proper implementation of existing privacy protections and confidentiality provisions.
- Work with state agencies with appropriate jurisdictions to create joint statements offering legal opinions on specific areas of discrimination typically encountered by persons with mental health challenges in the areas of housing, employment, and public accommodation.

- Create and disseminate anti-stigma education materials for treatment teams and discharge planning staff at mental health facilities and staff at public guardians' offices.

**3.3 Work to enhance and/or amend current statutes and regulations to further protect individuals and their family members from discrimination.**

- Develop a statewide committee with legal experts and diverse community members; build upon existing structures, when available, to evaluate existing laws and regulations for any embedded discriminatory provisions and gaps; and develop corrective strategies to address these problems.
- Disseminate widely the findings regarding legal gaps in current laws and regulations as well as the embedded discriminatory language in these laws and regulations, together with the recommended corrective strategies.

**3.4 Develop policies and mechanisms within the criminal justice system to more appropriately meet the needs of individuals with mental health challenges, including those located in in-patient psychiatric facilities.**

- Promote mental health courts and other alternatives to incarceration.
- Disseminate any court policies and protocols developed by the Judicial Council of California and the Administrative Office of the Courts designed to improve outcomes for and reduce recidivism of persons with mental health challenges in the criminal justice system.
- Develop training standards on anti-discrimination laws and regulations.
- Train law enforcement and criminal justice officials to recognize and prosecute mental health discrimination.

**Key characteristics of successful social marketing campaigns include:**

- Carefully planned approaches
- Multifaceted methods and strategies
- Multilevel – both local and statewide
- Focused on changing both attitudes and behaviors
- Long-term
- Adequately funded
- Actively involves key stakeholders and program partners
- Incorporates benchmarks and evaluation

**Strategic Direction 4: Increasing knowledge of effective and promising programs and practices that reduce stigma and discrimination using methods that include community-led approaches.**

**4.1 Develop and implement a plan to address the information gaps on how to reduce stigma and discrimination to build effective and promising anti-stigma and anti-discrimination programs.**

- Compile and report data on the community's strengths and how to best use this information in program design, development, and assessment.
- Develop incentives to build partnerships between academic research and community-based research.
- Provide assistance to counties in developing anti-stigma and anti-discrimination programs and the tools necessary to identify gaps and work collaboratively with the academic community.
- Utilize multi-disciplinary research techniques from the anthropological, medical, and recovery and wellness fields to guide research on the various forms of mental health stigma and discrimination.
- Identify research techniques on the evaluation of anti-stigma programs for local use.

**4.2 Increase the skills and abilities of community participants to evaluate programs.**

- Identify funding streams for communities to enhance their research and evaluation skills.
- Promote the community participatory methodology.

**4.3 Ensure that research and evaluation projects adapt and respond to community needs.**

- Design research projects with input from the community to address data elements, methodology, sample size, over-sampling of diverse populations, and other aspects as needed.
- Ensure that communities are actively involved in research and that findings are shared with the community for input.
- Utilize and disseminate existing research on social behavior campaigns targeted to ethnic groups and communities.
- Develop cross-cultural research and evaluation resources and tools.

**4.4 Disseminate the lessons learned, promising practices, and other outcome findings.**

- Ensure findings, research and assessment tools, and market research are easily accessible and widely disseminated as they become available, and encourage community researchers and community leaders to contribute information.



**For more information on the *California Strategic Plan on Reducing Mental Health Stigma and Discrimination* contact:  
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