



New Jersey Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma
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Youth, Young Adults and Other Groups Experience Mental Health Vulnerability NJ Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma Event Provides Critical Guidance

TRENTON –Even before the pandemic, youth and young adults from all racial and ethnic groups and the LGBTQ+ population experienced higher rates of depression and anxiety, and the prevalence of these potentially debilitating health conditions — and, therefore, possible risk of suicide — than other populations. Markedly, in the past few years, these rates have only increased. While there has been an increase in the suicide rate nationally, New Jersey still ranks second for the lowest suicide rate.

The LGBTQ+ population is more seriously impacted by mental health challenges and suicide risk, compared to their cisgender peers. Lack of education about mental health and different cultures can exacerbate mental health challenges and prevent individuals from receiving — and even seeking — the support they need. To address these serious issues, the New Jersey Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma will host *Engaging Vulnerable Youth and Young Adults* on August 14, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Hibernian Club, 2419 Kuser Road, Hamilton Square, NJ.

“The nation is in the midst of a mental health crisis, and youth and young adults — especially those from ethnic and racial minority groups and the LGBTQ+ community — are extremely vulnerable,” said Debra L. Wentz, PhD, Chair of the Council, President and CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies and Executive Director of the New Jersey Mental Health Institute. “The critical need for understanding mental health challenges, their impact on all aspects of life, and strategies for recognizing and addressing depression and anxiety cannot be overstated. Individuals’ lives are at risk. Education is essential to enable adults to effectively speak with youth who are struggling, as well as those who are healthy to hopefully prevent any mental health challenges that may arise from becoming severe.”

The Council's August 14, 2024 event will provide this vitally important education with the presentation and panel discussions described below:

- Keynote Presentation, *How Black Fathers Should Speak with their Teenagers about Mental Health and Racism*, Joel Austin, Founder, Daddy University, Inc.
- Panel Discussion, *Using Cultural Humility to Support Youth and their Mental Health*
 - Moderator: Joel Austin, Founder, Daddy University, Inc.
 - Askar Mirza, Member, New Jersey Department of Children and Families Youth Council
 - Kalisha Smith, LCSW, Associate Clinical Director, Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
 - Wendy Sefcik, Chair, New Jersey Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council

More

- Panel Discussion, *Ensuring Cultural Competence in Serving Youth, LGBTQ+ and other Vulnerable Populations*
 - Moderator: June DePonte Sernak, EdD, Statewide Diversity Consultant, Center for Family Service
 - Damon L. McDade, Associate Director Culture Connections, Family Connections
 - JP Pedoto, LSW, Pride+ Program Coordinator and Clinician, Family Connections

Lunch will be served. Click [here](#) for details and to register to attend this event.

For additional information about the Council, visit www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil/, write to GovernorsCouncil.MHStigma@dhs.nj.gov or call 609-438-4318.

Note for Media Representatives Who Would Like to Attend and Cover this Event:

Please contact Shauna Moses at smoses@njamhaa.org by 10:00 a.m. on Monday, August 12, 2024, as a required approval process must be followed before the press can be admitted into the event. Thank you.

Since its inception in November 2004 under an executive order issued by then Acting Governor Richard J. Codey, the Governor's Task Force on Mental Health Stigma has been working diligently toward the goal of combatting mental health stigma as a top priority in order to create a better mental health system. The Council members represent a diverse stakeholder group from across the state who provide a variety of expertise and critical perspectives to ensure a holistic approach to examining and striving to overcome the mental health challenges and issues facing New Jersey's richly diverse population.