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Last Updated: 05/23/2023



Mental Illness Awareness Week, 1987

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Mental illnesses afflict the rich and the poor, the young and the old. They respect neither race nor gender, robbing millions of Americans of full, productive, and happy lives. Millions more—relatives, friends, and co-workers—share the pain.

This pain is all the more regrettable because much of it is needless. Stigma, rooted in fear and ignorance, keeps many mentally ill citizens from getting the help they need. Adults in the prime of life are incapacitated by symptoms that could be prevented or ameliorated with appropriate treatments. Children, our most important resource for the future, are unable to reach their full potential because early symptoms are ignored and manifestations like alcohol and drug abuse often go unrecognized. Elderly citizens, the fastest growing segment of our population, are prematurely relegated to long-term care facilities due to improper diagnosis and lack of treatment.

The costs of inappropriate or inadequate response to mental illness are enormous. Economic losses alone can be measured in the billions of dollars, but the cost in human suffering is incalculable. Untreated mentally ill adults cannot work, ignored mentally ill children cannot learn, and misdiagnosed older citizens cannot contribute. Worst of all, young and old, bereft of hope, sometimes take their lives. Appropriate treatments can relieve suffering and save lives. They can also restore productivity and increase independence—helping Americans to continue contributing to, rather than become dependent on, society.

Americans can avoid the temptation to stigmatize those with mental illnesses by learning more about their causes and treatments. They must recognize that mental disorders are not due to personal weakness, but are heavily influenced by environmental stresses, genetic vulnerabilities, and biochemical and brain dysfunctions. Americans should know about, and use to its potential, the scientific progress that has brought an array of new treatments. Symptoms that once disabled can be alleviated. Dysfunctional behavior and thinking patterns that once crippled can be corrected. Psychological disorders that once undermined personal happiness can be ameliorated through counseling and therapy.

Further, Americans can take hope in a future enlightened by today's research. New technologies permit study of the living brain, shedding light on the neurochemical processes that underlie emotion, behavior, and thought. Genetic studies delve into the very substance of life, opening new insights into the causes and possible prevention of some of our most devastating mental illnesses. With knowledge, there is hope. With hope, there is progress.

In recognition that Americans need to know more about mental illnesses and their treatments, the Congress, by Public Law 100-81, has designated the week of October 4 through October 10, 1987, as "Mental Illness Awareness Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in its observance.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning October 4, 1987, as Mental Illness Awareness Week. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with ceremonies and activities that will enhance the well-being of this Nation by increasing understanding and knowledge of mental illnesses and their treatments.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan