

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Since 1949, May has been observed as National Mental Health Awareness Month. According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” Nearly one in five adults, or 43 million Americans, has a diagnosable mental health condition, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.



Source: Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center

Managing mental wellness is a crucial component of individual and unit readiness. By encouraging Airmen to proactively seek care for mental health concerns, it will aid in decreasing associated stigmas and improve public awareness of the availability and effectiveness of mental health treatment.

During this month, the Air Force will join the broader military community to promote mental health, learn more about mental health conditions, and encourage help-seeking behavior for those who experience or suffer silently from such conditions.

### Contributing Factors Affecting Mental Health

While invisible wounds such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are often associated with military service, they are not the most common mental health conditions Airmen face. Far more common are depression, anxiety, and adjustment issues that can significantly impact their Air Force career. For example, an Airman suffering from depression can experience symptoms such as constant fatigue, suicidal thoughts and ideations, and increased irritability, which may result in poor decision making. This can adversely affect the member's personal life and potentially put his or her Air Force career at risk.

Maintaining fit mental health involves formal psychological health programs and services, support from family, friends, community groups, faith communities, and anyone else that is a part of their support system. To be mentally fit, Airmen must take care of themselves regularly. Airmen are encouraged to schedule time for the things that are important and bring meaning to their lives such as spending time with family and friends, volunteering, and participating in activities outside of work.

#### Other factors that could affect mental health may be, but are not limited to:

- Genetics
- Significant Trauma
- Drug/Alcohol Abuse
- Work
- Diet
- Social Isolation (loneliness)
- Social Disadvantages

## Don't Suffer Alone: Seek Treatment, Get Help

Mental health conditions are relatively common within civilian and military communities. With early intervention, most mental health conditions can be effectively treated, and patients can return to a healthy mental wellness. Air Force mental health providers are trained in the latest clinical practice guidelines developed by the Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that individual treatment is the best medical science has to offer. Like with any medical illness/injury, the longer they wait to seek treatment, the harder it is for recovery.

Many people are too ashamed or embarrassed to seek the help they need for themselves or their loved ones. To focus on demystifying untruths surrounding mental health, proven methods can change their lives for the better. Please talk to your local helping agencies (Chaplains, Mental Health, MFLCs, A&FRCs, ER) to guide you on a resource that is right for you and your family.

### Mental Health Awareness Month Resources:

There are a variety of resources available to help anyone overcome their individual mental health challenges:

[Air Force Medical Services \(AFMS\)](#): The AFMS is hosting a month-long series on mental health. Click here to learn more about additional resources.

[Self-check](#): To check for symptoms of a specific mental health condition, this [screening tool](#) from the Department of Veterans Affairs gives users instant feedback. Results are also confidential and anonymous.

[TRICARE](#): The official health care program for military members and their families. TRICARE may provide coverage for medically necessary mental health services and their Mental Health Care Services offer outpatient psychotherapy for up to two sessions per week.

[VA Mental Health](#): Connects veterans and their families to mental health services. Programs aim to encourage people with mental health conditions achieve their full potential. Inpatient mental health hospital services, regardless of length or quantity, may be covered as long as the care is considered medically or psychologically necessary and appropriate.

[The National Institute of Mental Health](#): Provides information on a variety of mental health topics and list current clinical trials that allow individuals to access treatment for free.