

Spreading Hope, Spurring Action, Supporting Families, Saving Lives!

**“Our lives begin to end
the day we become silent
about things that matter.”**

Martin Luther King, Jr.



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

Vote November 6 With Mental Health in Mind

Every election, we hear the same thing. “This is the most important election of our lifetime.” “Your vote counts more than ever.” “If you don’t vote, then you can’t complain about the outcome of the election.” Well, guess what?

All of these statements are true. Every election has consequences...every vote counts...and, while we can’t control the election with our one vote, we can feel assured that we made our voices heard when we entered the election booth and cast our ballot.

This year, along with the many other issues that are important to you, I hope you will vote with “mental health in mind.” There are changes in health care and voting laws at the state and federal level that make it more important than ever for those of us in the mental health community to vote.

According to Mental Health America, MHA of Central Carolina’s national affiliate, there are many resources we can take advantage of to become informed mental health voters. First, you should know your rights when it comes to voting. Unfortunately, over the past several years, more and more restrictions have been placed on the voting process. According to the Brennan Center for Justice ([Brennan Center](#)), there is a growing use of state voting laws, redrawn districts, and ID requirements that can impact the 2018 electoral map. “More than 1 in 5 Americans experience some type of mental health condition, and it is crucial that all members of every community understand that individuals with mental health and substance use conditions and other disabilities have the right to assistance in voting. Individuals affected by mental health conditions need to be aware of changes in voting laws in the upcoming election. For the latest updates on YOUR state laws, visit The Fair Elections Network, an organization that works to remove barriers to voting and improve election administration across the United States.”

As with any issue, there are many systemic problems surrounding mental health that can only be addressed in the legislature, whether it is on a state or national level. Here are some of the issues we need to ask candidates about:

Workforce and Access: many communities face a shortage of mental health providers. Because of this workforce shortage, many people cannot access the supports and services they need. Other supports, like peer services and telehealth programs are also not widely available.

Families: Families struggle to find the best ways to support their children with emotional and behavioral challenges. They have to cobble together what they can from what is available, but might not be what they need and they receive little support to find what's best.

Children's Issues: Only a small percentage of children who need services in schools actually get them. Often, children receive school-based services only after things get very bad and even when they do, these services are not coordinated with services they receive outside of school.

Parity for Mental Health: Even after the passage of the federal Mental Health and Addictions Parity and Equity Act in 2008, there is still uncertainty about what exactly is expected. There is very little federal/state oversight and enforcement of the parity law, but there is clear evidence of violations.

Insurance Coverage: Skippy insurance plans that provide little or no mental health, substance use treatment benefits and that do not cover prescription medications, exclude pre-existing conditions, are becoming more widely available.

Criminal Justice: As jails and prisons have become the largest behavioral health providers, support for evidence-based jail diversion programs has grown. Unfortunately, most of these programs are funded by short-term grants, which hurt their effectiveness and sustainability.

Veterans: More than half a million Iraq and Afghanistan war vets have not sought care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) even though 20 percent of vets have PTSD or depression, and another 20 percent report traumatic brain injury during deployment.

Work Requirements: States (including North Carolina) are moving to require people covered under Medicaid to meet and report minimum work hours. Most people on Medicaid do work, maintaining health coverage keeps people at work, and mental health conditions are episodic sometimes making it difficult for people to work or report hours.

How can you help spread the word? Through social media, there are endless opportunities to raise awareness about mental health in the 2018 midterms. Some suggestions: post about the election on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (share this blog post); follow local and national health advocacy and policy organizations on social media to get the latest on current legislation; send messages, comments to candidates.

Regardless of which party you align yourself with, I hope you will get out and vote, and learn about mental health issues that are affecting the one in five in our country. Along with the individuals and children who are diagnosed with a mental health concern, there are the families, caregivers and loved ones, who need our help in changing the mental health landscape. Join Mental Health America of Central Carolinas on November 6 and be a "mental health voter."

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Kathy Rogers
Executive Director

Resources to Be An Informed Voter:

[Major Party Platforms-Republican](#)

[Major Party Platforms-Democratic](#)

[Health Policy](#)

[Local and State Candidate Websites](#)

Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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