

Rural Mental Program in a Box



Purpose and Justification

Rural communities face significant mental health care challenges due to a shortage of providers and limited internet access. With 20% fewer primary care providers and a lack of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners, residents struggle to access specialized care. Additionally, 28% of rural Americans lack broadband internet, hindering access to online and telehealth resources. The suicide rate in rural areas is significantly higher—between 18.3 and 20.5 per 100,000—compared to urban areas. Rural residents also experience higher rates of depression and are less likely to seek mental health services.

A key barrier is stigma, where mental illness is often seen as a personal weakness rather than a legitimate health condition. This stigma leads to unwarranted shame and prevents individuals from seeking help. Raising awareness that mental illness is a disease—similar to cancer or diabetes—and normalizing conversations about mental health can combat this stigma. Sharing personal experiences and openly discussing mental health challenges are crucial steps toward encouraging individuals to seek help and support each other. This program aims to address these issues by providing essential mental health information and resources to underserved rural populations, helping to overcome stigma and improve access to care.

This program aims to bridge the gap by helping rural community organizations enhance access to mental health information and resources. Equipping community organizations with these resources, we help improve mental health support in rural areas, addressing the critical need for accessible, reliable information.

Remember, the goal of this program is to help people find the information they need by providing access to reliable, evidence-based resources. This program does not offer medical advice or provider recommendations.

Target Audience

People who live in rural areas.

Program Objectives

- Increase awareness of mental health information resources
- Raise awareness of rural mental health issues
- Reduce the stigma around mental health in rural areas.

Planning

Potential Partners

You do not have to go it alone when providing mental health programming. In fact, it's better to partner! Partnering to provide mental health programming amplifies the impact and reach of initiatives by combining the strengths, resources, and expertise of multiple organizations. Collaborative efforts not only broaden access to vital mental health resources but also foster a sense of community support, breaking down stigmas and ensuring that individuals receive comprehensive care and education tailored to their unique needs.

- **Local Libraries:** As hosts and community hubs, libraries can play a central role in organizing and promoting the event.
- **Mental Health Organizations:** Partnering with organizations like NAMI Iowa, local community mental health centers, and Your Life Iowa can provide expertise and resources.
- **Healthcare Providers:** Collaboration with local hospitals, clinics, and individual mental health professionals can offer participants firsthand insights.
- **Educational Institutions:** Schools, colleges, and universities can help reach younger audiences and provide venues.
- **Nonprofits and Community Groups:** Organizations focused on health, wellness, and community support can help with outreach and participation.
- **Faith-Based Organizations:** Churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions often provide mental health support within their communities.
- **Local Public Health Department:** Engaging with local public health departments can enhance the event's reach and effectiveness by integrating public health perspectives and resources.
- **National Alliance on Mental Health, Iowa** - find your local office. NAMI Iowa serves residents across the state with free mental health support, online groups, resources, and education.

Guest Speakers: Mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, public health professionals, etc. to provide expert advice and answer questions.

Passive Program: Information Resource Hub

Provide ongoing access to mental health information for rural communities and reduce stigma by making information access easy.

Resource Station: Set up a dedicated area in community centers or libraries with printed materials and digital access points.

Online Portal: Create a website or page with links to digital resources, local mental health services, and informational guides.

Community Bulletin Board: Regularly update with new resources, upcoming events, and mental health tips.

Active Program: Presentation of Resources

This program aims to increase awareness of mental health information resources, raise awareness of rural mental health issues, and reduce the stigma around mental health in rural areas.

Outline This is just a suggestion; please feel free to adapt as it fits your needs).

- Introduction (5 minutes)
 - Welcome and Introduction:
 - Brief introduction of the presenter and purpose of the session.
 - Disclaimer (Optional): This presentation does not provide mental health advice. Always seek the advice of a licensed Mental Health Provider regarding any questions or concerns you have about your mental health.
- Understanding rural mental health issues: Overview of the data about mental health in rural areas (Use the resources section to pull out facts and create these slides
 - Common mental health issues are faced by people in rural areas, including veterans and farmers.
 - Stigma
- Rural Mental Health: Resources (15 minutes) Select and demonstrate 2-5 sites below. You can include all of them in a handout, but showing all of them will overwhelm attendees.
- Q&A and Discussion (5 minutes)
- Open the floor for questions and discussions about mental health resources and strategies.
- Share any related upcoming programming.

Active Program: Presentation of Resources Continued

Handouts

- Distribute a handout with the links included here and any local resources.
- Provide contact information for local mental health support services.

Organization

Event Planning:

- Timeline: Start planning at least 4 months in advance.
- Venue: Choose a venue with adequate space for the expected audience, accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Format: Decide whether the program will be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. Consider the needs and preferences of the target audience.
- Speakers: Invite mental health professionals or experienced speakers to lead discussions and workshops.
- Materials: Ensure all necessary materials are prepared in advance, including printouts, digital resources, and promotional items.

Promotion

Promotion is the key to increasing event attendance. Work with your partners to share information about your program. Some ways to promote your event:

- Social Media Campaign
- Newsletters
- Press Releases
- Word of Mouth
- Flyers
- Handouts

Day of the Event

1. Have your handouts ready
2. Track attendance, anonymously
3. Don't forget time for Q&A.
4. Feedback Collection: Distribute feedback forms – see evaluation section.



Post Event Follow-Up

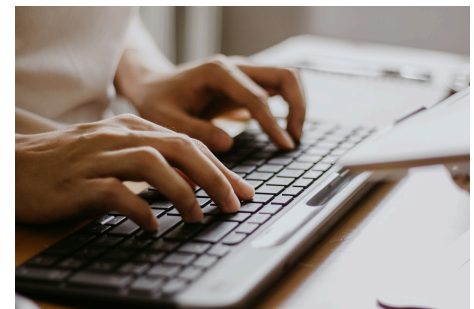
- **Resource Distribution:** Post sources and links on your blog, website, and social media. This lets people who were not able to attend access them and allows attendees who misplace their handouts to locate information later.
- **Survey:** Send out a post-event survey to assess participant satisfaction and gather ideas for future events.
- **Thank You Notes:** Acknowledge the contributions of partners, speakers, and volunteers.

Evaluation and Impact

- **Attendance:** Track the number of attendees
- **Outcomes:** Use a tool like [Project Outcome](#), which is free for public libraries, to track outcomes for the event using print or online surveys.
- **Feedback:** Use participant and partner feedback to refine future iterations of the program.

Resources

- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) – call or text. Free, confidential, 24/7 crisis line providing emotional support and crisis counseling to people in crisis
- [Rural Mental Health Crisis](#) (Mental Health America) This website provides data on rural health issues and access to mental health care.
- [Rural Mental Health Resilience A Program of hope](#) (Rural Minds) This website includes facts and data about rural mental health. It also includes four programs and downloadable and printable resources.
- [Facts About Rural Mental Health](#)- flyers, factsheets on stigma, myths, suicide awareness and prevention, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, major depression, postpartum depression, schizophrenia, substance use disorder, tardive dyskinesia
- [Talking About Rural Mental Health](#), Conversation Starters, Sample Email Content and Social Media Posts, “Wallet Cards” – Printable program promotional hand-out
- [Free Rural Mental Health Resources](#) -crisis resources, mental health resources by topic, mental health resources a-to-z



Resources Continued

- [Hosting A Rural Mental Health Event](#), event planning roadmap, key messages for a community talk, PowerPoint slide presentation, editable event brochure |, media alert for Grange event, detailed media release, interview Q&A template, social media post graphics, printed banner pdf, website banner graphic, yard sign
- [Rural Mental Health \(Rural Health Information Hub\)](#).
- [Mental Health in Rural Communities Toolkit](#) features evidence-based models, resources, and program examples for successfully developing and implementing mental health programs to serve rural communities.
- [Rural Suicide Prevention Toolkit](#) highlights innovative, evidence-based models and resources to develop and implement successful suicide prevention programs in rural communities.
- [Rural Response to Farmer Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Health Professional Shortage Areas: Mental Health, by County.](#) A visualization of access to mental health professionals by state and country.

Veterans Resource

A disproportionate share of veterans live in rural America.

- [Rural Veterans and Access to Healthcare – \(Rural Health Information Hub\)](#)
- [Mental health services and coverage \(The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs\)](#)
- [PsychArmor Institute – provides free online courses on issues relevant to military and veteran communities, with a focus on mental health, developed by experts for healthcare professionals, educators, and a variety of caregivers.](#)
- [Rural Health Concerns \(MedlinePlus\)](#)

Access the full Mental Health Information Community Partnerships Toolkit
<https://www.nlm.gov/guides/mental-health-information-community-partnerships-toolkit>



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