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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mental Health Concerns Growing As COVID-19 Pandemic Spreads and Intensifies

Covington, KY- As the “peak” of the COVID-19 pandemic draws near and government officials begin to prepare for a return to “normal business,” new data from Mental Health America (MHA National) show how deeply the pandemic is affecting the mental health of the nation and how different any “new normal” might be.

These are the new top lines gleaned from the tens of thousands screening results MHA National has collected through its free, anonymous online mental health screening program in recent weeks. This latest data builds on and updates data released in mid-March.

- COVID-19 worry is leading to increases in mental health conditions, led by more than 4,865 additional moderate-to-severe anxiety screening results in February, March, and the first half of April. The number is accelerating rapidly in April; this curve is not bending.
- The numbers of anxiety, youth, and depression screeners all increased by 18-22 percent in March 2020. The pace of anxiety screenings in April has increased even more.
- Even when the number of screeners for a mental health condition did not increase, the severity of their March results often did- the percent with severe psychosis increased by 7 percent over the average of the previous 5 months.
- These impacts on mental health are more pronounced in young people (under the age of 25), with roughly 9 in 10 screening with moderate-to-severe depression, and people with chronic condition, with more than 85 percent screening with moderate-to-severe anxiety and depression.
- “Loneliness and isolation” is cited by the greatest percentage of screeners (58 percent) as contributing to mental health problems “right now,” with COVID-19 close behind (48 percent).
- There was a 33 percent increase in the percent share of depression screeners who reported having a chronic condition and a 36 percent increase in the percent share of anxiety screeners who reported having a chronic condition. The share of depression screeners with a chronic health condition increased from 12 percent to 16 percent of all depression screeners, and the share of anxiety screeners with a chronic health condition increased from 11 percent to 15 percent.

“There is absolutely no question that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the nation’s mental health,” said Paul Gionfriddo, president and CEO of Mental Health America (National). Based on our numbers which capture only a fraction of those affected, already 4,895 more people now have moderate-to-severe anxiety than would have been expected just two months ago, and many thousands more with depression. None of the more severe mental health conditions, including severe anxiety, depression, and psychosis is going to go away on its own when the immediate threats to physical health dissipate over the coming months or years. We know that this is directly related to

worries about COVID-19. 58 percent of screeners who responded attributed their “right now” mental health condition to loneliness and isolation and 48 percent specifically to COVID-19, and 34 percent to current events. More mental health concerns are coming as financial problems and grief set in.

Mental Health America of Northern Kentucky and Southwest Ohio, the region’s local MHA affiliate, quickly pivoted when COVID-19 arrived. Liz Atwell, Executive Director of the affiliate shared, “We knew our best method to continue service provision was through technology, allowing us to stay front and center in the lives of those we serve.” The affiliate is using social media, including Facebook Live, to reach individuals and provide recovery supports. New clients continue to be accepted through virtual enrollment on the phone, using platforms like Zoom, and in person when needed.

Mindy Sponseller said, “I’m suggesting that everyone, if you aren’t already, start thinking about how to protect mental health. MHA has an infographic titled COVID-19 and Your Mental Health that can be shared, posted, referenced- you name it. We have to help people understand the magnitude of impact this pandemic is having and how to give or get support.” Mindy Sponseller is the Director of Clinical Services for the local affiliate.

Mental Health America of Northern Kentucky and Southwest Ohio has many resources to provide help. Visit the website at www.mhankyswoh.org or call 859-431-1077 or 513-721-2910 for assistance.