



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mental Health Month shines spotlight on emotional wellbeing, help available in WNC

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Vaya Health is encouraging western North Carolinians to check up on their own emotional wellbeing in May as the nation observes Mental Health Month.

Good mental health involves a balance of thoughts, emotions and behaviors that allow a person to feel positive about life and accomplish daily goals. Mental health issues can occur when this balance is disrupted, causing a person to experience persistent distress and difficulty functioning in everyday life.

Established in 1949, Mental Health Month is part of a national movement to emphasize the importance of good mental health for individuals and communities, fight stigma and provide support to loved ones. While one in five people will experience a mental health disorder during their lifetime, many Americans who had never had mental health challenges found themselves struggling for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased isolation and societal upheaval, according to the nonprofit organization Mental Health America.

In November 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 44 percent of Americans were dealing with either depression or anxiety.

“We all go through times when we struggle – it’s a very normal human condition,” said Christine Elliott, a licensed counselor and director of Member Services Care Coordination at Vaya, based in Asheville. “The good news is that mental health disorders are treatable, and everyone has the capacity to increase their resiliency to heal and ‘bounce back’ from life challenges.”

Checking on your mental health and use of alcohol or other drugs – known together as behavioral health – is just as important as blood pressure checks, cholesterol screenings and other activities that help people stay physically well, Elliott said.

“During the pandemic, a lot of people stopped going to medical appointments and delayed care for mental health or substance use concerns,” she said. “Now is an ideal time to check up on your behavioral health and seek professional help if you are experiencing troubling symptoms. Many counselors and prescribers are offering

appointments via telehealth, which allows people to participate in treatment using their phone or computer, without leaving home.”

In western North Carolina, tools and resources are available that can support the mental wellbeing of individuals and improve the health of entire communities:

- Anyone can call Vaya’s Access to Care Line at 1-800-849-6127 for help in a behavioral health crisis or for information about local treatment options, including services for adults and children who receive Medicaid or who are uninsured. This free, confidential service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.
- Vaya offers anonymous, confidential screenings for common mental health and substance use issues online at Vayamindful.org. This free service provides a “check up from the neck up” with immediate screening results and information on next steps and helpful resources.
- Mental Health America offers a free, practical “Tools 2 Thrive” toolkit that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency. The tools focus on different topics that can help process the events of the past year and the feelings that surround them, while also building up skills and supports that extend beyond COVID-19. To get started, visit www.mhanational.org/may.

To learn more about Mental Health Month, including how to participate in the “You Are Not Alone” campaign from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), visit nami.org/MentalHealthMonth.

About Vaya Health

Based in Asheville, N.C., Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 22 western North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to care and crisis assistance are available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.

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