

House Bill 605 Veterans – Behavioral Health Services – Mental Health First Aid

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 9, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present this testimony in support of House Bill 605.

House Bill 605 requires the Maryland Department of Health to include mental health first aid among the behavioral health services it coordinates for veterans and their families. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a world-renowned, evidence-based program that teaches how to recognize and respond to a person with a mental health or substance use concern or crisis.

MHAMD worked with the Maryland Behavioral Health Administration, the National Council for Behavioral Health, and the Missouri Department of Health to adapt MHFA for the United States. Since 2009, MHAMD has been responsible for the development, oversight and implementation of the statewide *MHFA Maryland* program. The program has trained over 36,000 Marylanders, including over 700 instructors, 15 of whom are self-identified veteran instructors. MHAMD utilizes a corps of instructors and master trainers who primarily deliver free and scholarship-based trainings through a state grant. This ensures that no one seeking MHFA training is turned away.

The availability of MHFA training for veterans and their families is particularly important given the high prevalence of behavioral health concerns among veterans and active duty military members:

- In 2015, veterans accounted for 14.3% of suicide deaths as compared to 8% of the adult US population
- On average, one US veteran dies by suicide nearly every hour
- Veteran suicides in Maryland average over 100 per year (308 from 2015-2017)

In addition to the skills taught in the core MHFA class – which includes information about various behavioral health disorders, risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns, and a 5-step action plan to help someone in crisis – *MHFA Maryland* features a veterans' module that includes:

- A discussion of military culture and its relevance to the topic of mental health
- A discussion of the specific risk factors faced by many service members and their families such as mental and physical trauma, stress, separation, etc.
- How to break down the stigma associated with substance use disorders and mental illnesses like anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and more
- How to reach out to those who suffer in silence, reluctant to seek help
- Community resource information

HB 605 should help get MHFA training to more veterans and their family members. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

10-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Bringing essential mental health training
to communities throughout Maryland.



IMPACTING, PARTNERING, TRANSFORMING

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is the second oldest mental health advocacy group in the nation. It was formed more than a century ago when a group of concerned citizens gathered in Baltimore to take action to improve the lives of individuals living with mental illness. From prevention and early intervention to treatment and crisis intervention, MHAMD works to ensure that Marylanders have access to services when and where they need them. Training individuals in Mental Health First Aid,[®] so they can better respond with care and support to loved ones, coworkers or a stranger is one of the many ways we work to improve the mental health of communities across our state. Tens of thousands of Marylanders have been helped since we worked with other national leaders to bring this evidence-based program to the U.S.

In 10 years, over 36,000 Marylanders have been trained and they in turn have made a positive impact on the lives of countless others. Our Mental Health First Aiders have created a network of awareness about mental health in communities across the state and reduce the stigma of mental illness every day. We're proud of the MHFA Maryland program's impact over the past decade and are excited about opportunities to continue to build community capacity to recognize and respond to mental health needs in every corner of Maryland.

Linda J. Raines, CEO
Mental Health Association of Maryland

Mental Health First Aid Maryland, a program of the Mental Health Association of Maryland, is pleased to present this 10-year impact report. One of the original partners of the Mental Health First Aid program, the Mental Health Association of Maryland in partnership with the State of Maryland Behavioral Health Administration, the National Council for Behavioral Health and the Missouri Department of Health worked collaboratively to develop this program and bring it to the United States.

Over the course of 10 years, our program has aimed to reach all Marylanders. Mental Health First Aid, an 8-hour public education national certification course, teaches individuals, professionals, businesses and community members how to recognize and respond to a person with a mental health concern or crisis. Many people may not talk about mental health concerns due to stigma. One of the goals of the program is to help reduce stigma by emphasizing important messages that mental health concerns are common and wellness and recovery are possible.

Mental Health First Aid Maryland looks forward to our next 10 years bringing this training to others all across Maryland. The skills taught in training empower individuals to reach out, provide help and support to a person in need. Together, we can continue to expand our reach and strengthen our communities.

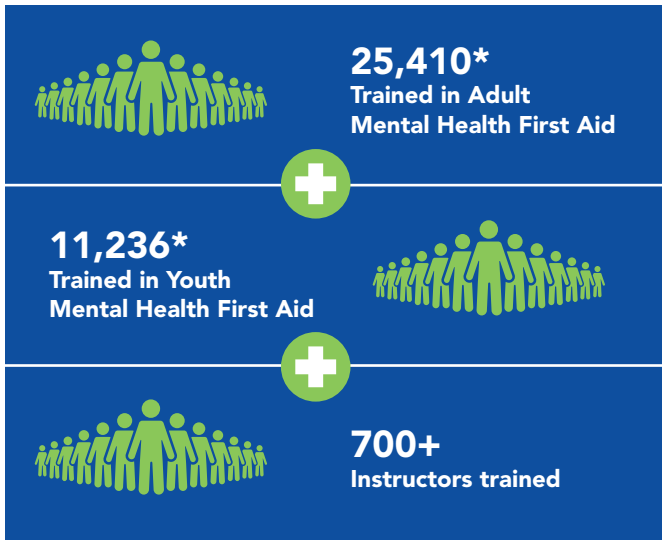
Jennifer Treger, Director
Mental Health First Aid Maryland



IMPACTING

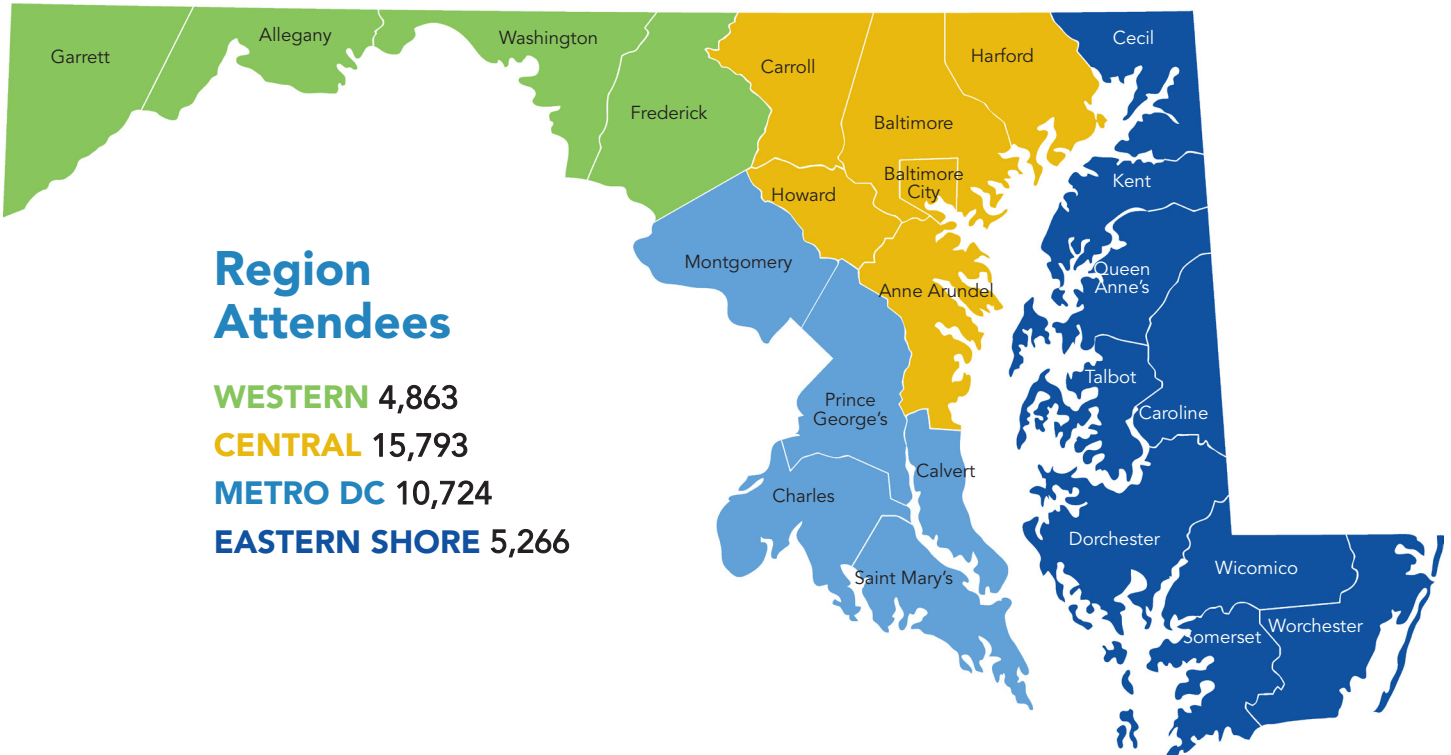
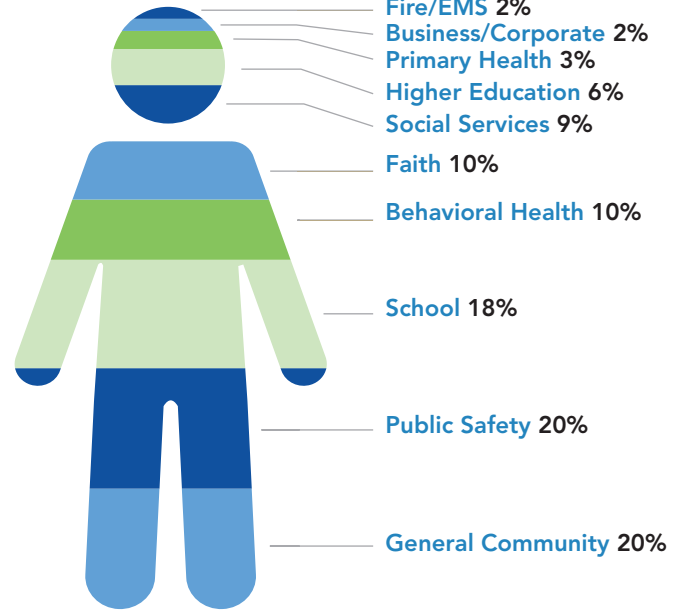
Since the inception of the program, over 36,000 people have been trained in Mental Health First Aid. Imagine the impact. 36,000 people who have the skills to provide a person who may be experiencing a mental health concern or crisis with the care support, and resources they may need. As we work to create safer, caring and more supportive communities across the state, Mental Health First Aid is critical to the support we can provide.

36,646* Marylanders trained in 10 years



*Numbers of first aiders trained are updated on a monthly basis.

Audiences



IMPACTING

Mental Health First Aid Maryland has been part of Mental Health First Aid USA since the program's inception. Together with the **State of Maryland Behavioral Health Administration (formerly known as Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene)**, we leveraged federal funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to create the first Mental Health First Aid USA curriculum. This was accomplished in partnership with the Missouri Department of Mental Health and the National Council for Behavioral Health. With continued funding during the past 10 years, Mental Health First Aid Maryland has been able to make instructor and first aider training affordable and accessible to individuals across the state.

TOTAL GRANTS: \$4.7 million



PARTNERING

Key stakeholders and community partners were instrumental in the development, implementation and growth of Mental Health First Aid Maryland. Through the power of partnerships, MHFA Maryland has expanded to include State-level organizations such as the Maryland State Department of Education, State of Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission, and the State of Maryland Department of Juvenile Services.

Department of Juvenile Services:

2,000+

DJS staff trained in Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid

85% More incidents of youth at risk for self-injury or suicide identified

DJS has incorporated Youth Mental Health First Aid as mandatory training for all of its new and existing staff giving them the necessary skills to identify mental health concerns. From a study conducted with staff at DJS:

- Over 50% of the time staff used Youth Mental Health First Aid in situations of growing concern hopefully averting a crisis.

“The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services requires all staff to complete Youth Mental Health First Aid. This highly participatory training provides practical skills for our staff to respond to youth who are experiencing mental health issues or is in a behavioral health crises. In addition, YMHFA provides a foundation as they learn skills to assist youth with substance abuse or trauma issues.”

Robert Anderson, LCSW-C
Social Work Manager Department of Juvenile Services

Maryland Schools:

6,800+
First Aiders Trained

381 Instructors Trained

Over 13,500+
Referrals of Youth to Resources

- In recent years, the Mental Health Association of Maryland has partnered with the Maryland State Department of Education, local school districts and school partners to provide Youth Mental Health First Aid training through the federally funded MD AWARE grant.

6,800+ school personnel and partners trained, including:

Teachers, Coaches, Administrators, Nurses & Health Specialists, School Safety Officers, Bus Drivers, District Leaders, Guidance and Pupil Personnel Workers Parents, Community Partners
“The partnership between the Mental Health Association of Maryland and the Maryland State Department of Education has been invaluable in the implementation of Youth Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health First Aid in schools. The training content has been instrumental in building the capacity of school staff to identify, assess, and locate appropriate resources for individuals in a crisis.”

Deborah Nelson, Ph.D., NCSP
Section Chief, School Safety and Climate, Specialist, School Psychological Services Maryland State Department of Education

Police and Corrections:

7,200+
Public Safety Professionals Trained

Public safety officials were early adopters of Mental Health First Aid in Maryland.

- Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions were one of the first in the nation to offer education credit for the program.
- Several police and corrections jurisdictions have embedded the curriculum into their training and orientation programs.
- Multiple schools and universities across the state offer Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid for their school resource officers and campus police

“After a decade, Mental Health First Aid continues to be one of the flagship programs used by Maryland public safety to enhance its ability to recognize, respond to, and compassionately assist people in crisis. It has not only reduced stigma and enhanced service but has become a champion for first responder self-care, wellness and resilience.”

Lieutenant Marc Junkerman
Harford County (MD) Sheriff's Office

TRANSFORMING

BUILDING SKILLS, SAVING LIVES:

Mental Health First Aid has the power to transform communities. Anyone in our community may encounter a person who is experiencing a mental health problem or crisis at work, school or in our everyday lives. By teaching Marylanders the skills to stop, listen and provide support, we are creating the ripple effect that builds greater hope and positive change for people in distress.

Asking important questions

"We trained all of our pupil personnel workers (PPWs) as a group. I always tell people if they aren't comfortable asking the direct question if someone is thinking of suicide, they should go home and practice. About a year after the training, a young lady went missing after telling a friend she was suicidal. The PPW found her in a park and was able to be confident and ask her the question. **The young lady was actively suicidal and the PPW was able to get her to the hospital and get her the help she needed.**"

—Charles County Public Schools

Breaking down Stigma

"Because of my participation in Mental Health First Aid I now have a greater understanding of my sister Inee's struggles and a sincere appreciation of her courage and strength. I wish I had the training while she was living. That would have made a big difference in both of our lives and how I would have responded to her."

—Minister Joyce M Frazier

"**Mental Health First Aid has empowered me to not feel afraid to talk to someone who's crying...** just to stop and be in the moment with that person and let them know that they're not alone"

—MHFA Participant

RESULTS:

INITIAL RESULTS

A survey conducted with first aiders trained in Maryland showed:

Half of respondents reported using the ALGEE action plan at a time of distress as opposed to a crisis.

LASTING RESULTS



TRANSFORMING AND BEYOND

In the past 10 years, Mental Health First Aid Maryland has worked to create infrastructure and embed instructors in key agencies and organizations throughout the state. With the work we have accomplished, there is still more to do.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The goals of the Mental Health First Aid Maryland program are:

- Raise visibility of MHFA generating a ripple effect of prevention & wellness
- Create a state-wide culture of MHFA - Not as a program but as a community changer
- Focus in high need areas:
 - o Domestic Violence
 - o Farmers, Rural Communities
 - o First Responders- Law Enforcement and Fire
 - o Veterans & their Families
 - o Youth & School Systems
- Create a community among instructors especially in hard to reach areas geographically
- Increase professional development through certification and licensure requirements

**Continue to help our communities be more caring,
compassionate, and supportive.**



**“It really gives you the
skills you need to
identify—and ultimately
help—someone in need”**

—First Lady Michelle Obama
on being trained in Mental Health First Aid

WHO SHOULD BE TRAINED IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?

Schools

Teachers

Coaches

Barbers

Veterans

Faith Leaders

Fire/EMS

Higher Education
staff and students

General
Community

Hospital Staff

Peer Recovery
Specialists

Behavioral Health
Professionals

Law Enforcement
Public Safety

Primary Care staff

YOU!



Mental Health First Aid Maryland is a program of the Mental Health Association of Maryland.

To learn more, please visit www.mhfamaryland.org
or email at mhfatraining@mhamd.org



MENTAL
HEALTH
FIRST AID®
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