



## **WELCOME**

Welcome to our inaugural national conference! We are very excited to have you here to learn, share, network and take back to your communities the truth - mental health problems which include substance use disorders are physical medical conditions!

From child to senior, people are getting sick and dying because America has not been properly educated on the early signs and symptoms of mental health problems which include addictions. Research shows in the majority of cases, mental health problems precede a substance use disorder by about three years.

The overall cost of America's drug addiction problem is one trillion dollars (\$1,000,000,000,000) every year. The annual cost of suicide and suicide attempts in America is estimated at \$93.5 billion (\$93,500,000,000)! And the numbers keep rising. People are suffering. People are dying. Families are being destroyed.

Just like other physical illnesses, the earlier the treatment the better. Yet there are very few dollars being effectively spent on prevention and early intervention education for mental health issues. We are overdue for changing things up. Americans can get well if we address the core problem. Prevention and early intervention education of mental health problems including substance use abuse, are the keys.

It is well established there are four stages to a medical condition:

- 1) mild symptoms and warning signs;
- 2) symptoms increase in frequency and severity and interfere with life's activities and roles;
- 3) symptoms worsen with relapsing and recurring episodes accompanied by serious disruption in life activities and roles;
- 4) symptoms are persistent and severe and have jeopardized one's life

Yet, the medical conditions related to mental health problems have only been provided education for the 4<sup>th</sup> stage of illness which is where addiction and suicide occur. There are early signs and symptoms of mental health problems (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages of the illnesses) but Americans do not know what they are! Without education on prevention and the early signs and symptoms of a mental health problem, people get sicker and sicker. Without recognition or understanding of what is wrong, we have an opiate epidemic and a suicide epidemic which is really a mental health epidemic.

We encourage every American to learn the very early signs and symptoms of a mental health problem forming so we can become a healthier, safer, loving society. On our website, [AmericanMentalWellness.org](http://AmericanMentalWellness.org), under the Resources tab, there are prevention and early intervention educational materials that show, from preschool to older adult, the 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> stage signs and symptoms of a mental health problem which includes substance use disorders. On the other side of each card are prevention tools.

Without providing prevention and early intervention education on mental health problems, it is nearly impossible to reduce the number of people living with addictions and/or the number of people succumbing to suicide. We do need to help our very sick; but not educating for prevention and early intervention of these physical medical conditions will continue to keep us in poor health and throw money to the wind.

We hope you return to your communities and share this vital message with everyone.

***Sharon Engdahl***

**AMWA Executive Director**