

Rural Mental Health First Aid

Nearly twenty percent of people in the United States live in a rural area. The challenges faced by residents in rural areas are significantly different than those in urban areas. Rural populations are often underserved and possess health and behavioral health disparities. Rural communities have a chronic shortage of behavioral health providers and limited access to services.

Mental Health First Aid has the potential to address these disparities in rural communities by increasing mental health literacy (i.e., knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management, or prevention) among key community members – creating a stronger, more prepared network of support for individuals living in rural areas.

Rural Mental Health First Aid is a way to build community level capacity to identify mental health and substance abuse issues early and for rural residents to increase their confidence to intervene and refer people to the resources that do exist. Rural communities have a long history of being innovative and taking responsibility. Mental Health First Aid is a way to increase the level of baseline knowledge about mental health and substance abuse issues and to decrease the negative perceptions often associated with these issues.

Our targeted effort to serve rural communities addresses their unique characteristics, recognizes the community of rural Mental Health First Aid instructors, and enhances community capacity around behavioral health issues in rural areas.

Mental Health First Aid for Law Enforcement and Public Safety

An awareness of the particular needs of people with mental illness can help officers and staff better serve the public, work more efficiently and increase safety

An officer or staff person's ability to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness can be a valuable tool when assessing an individual or incident

Individuals with severe mental illness are eleven times more likely to be the victim of a crime than the general population. (2005 study by Northwestern University)

Increased access to mental health treatment will lead to decreased encounters with the criminal justice system overall

Public Safety Staff often work with the same individuals across the criminal justice system

Appropriate Audiences:

Law Enforcement Officers	Corrections	Fire / EMS
Private Security	Dispatchers	Legal / Justice / Pre-Trial
Probation and Parole	Reentry / Employment	Behavioral Health Staff
Non-profit Staff	Faith-based Staff	Peer Support Specialists

Local, State or Federal Government Staff