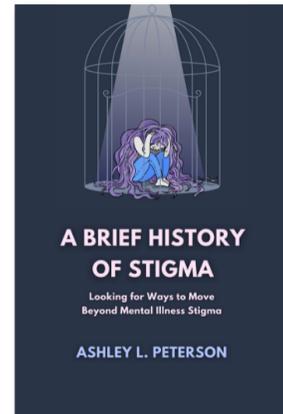




Political Advocacy to Challenge Mental Illness Stigma

mentalhealthathome.org



A Brief History of Stigma: Stigma Reduction Toolkit Political Advocacy

Whether you like politics or not, what governments do can have a big impact on the lives of people with mental illness. They're the ones that need to take action in order to address structural stigma and increase funding for mental health services. That means we need to make sure that they hear our voices.

Getting in touch with your local elected officials is one way of getting active; you can also jump on board with the efforts of mental health organizations lobbying for positive changes. It may feel like a drop in the bucket, but small drops can add up.

Volunteer opportunities

Many mental health organizations, both national and local, do advocacy work around legislation and policy, and there may be opportunities for you to volunteer and support their work. Check with charities in your area to see what opportunities they have available. These large organizations also have advocacy volunteer positions:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): [Field advocates](#)
- Mental Health America: [Advocacy Network](#)
- Mind: [Be a Mind Campaigner](#)

Policy Initiatives

If you want to get in touch with your local representatives around a cause that's important to you, it can be helpful to have background information to help you choose your key messages and back them up with data. Large mental health organizations often publish policy briefs and other reports on their websites, and they can be a great source of well-researched information.

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) [Public Policy Action Center](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) policy & research
- [JED Foundation Advocacy](#)
- Mental Health America:
 - [Current Mental Health Legislation](#)
 - [Position Statements](#)
- [Mind](#) (Australia)
- [NAMI Advocacy](#)
- [National Stigma Report Card](#) (Australia)
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#) (UK) campaigns
- [See Me Scotland](#)

Advocacy Campaign Resources

Are you new to advocacy and haven't got the slightest clue where to begin? There are tools for that.

- AFSP: [Advocacy 101 video](#)
- American Association of Pediatrics: [Advocacy Guide](#)
- California Medical Association: [Grassroots Advocacy](#) (geared towards physicians, but has tips that are more broadly useful)
- CMHA Alberta: [Making Mental Health Matter Advocacy Toolkit](#)
- Mental Health Commission of Canada: [Government Engagement Toolkit](#)
- NAMI [Smarts for Advocacy](#) training
- Orygen [Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit](#)
- Schizophrenia Society of Canada [Advocacy Tool Kit](#)
- STRIPED @ Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: [Power Prism Advocacy Framework](#)
- University of Kansas Community Toolbox: [Principles of Advocacy](#) | [Conducting a Direct Action Campaign](#)
- [Wego Health Network](#): has patient leader training for health advocates

Here are some tips for effective advocacy from the Schizophrenia Society of Canada:

- Know the issues and research your facts
- Present your own story as an example of a real person in the official's constituency
- Tie your issue into constituency issues or issues that the politician has already shown an interest in
- Target the right level of government for the change you're after
- Be strategic with timing; newly elected politicians may be looking for ideas to champion
- Develop a few key messages (they suggest 3) that are clear and compelling

Letter-Writing Tips

Phone calls, in-person meetings, and town hall events are all options for connecting with your local politicians, but they might be a bit much for anyone with limited internal resources, especially when mental illness symptoms are ongoing. Letter-writing and email are easier options for the advocate, although they may have less impact.

These letter-writing tips come from the Schizophrenia Society of Canada's [Advocacy Tool Kit](#):

- 1st paragraph: clearly state that you're a constituent and say what your issue is; if you're writing about a particular piece of legislation, clearly specify it
- 2nd paragraph: focus on your own story/experience related to the issue
- Next paragraphs: lay out core facts and 3 key messages regarding the issue
- State your "ask," the tangible thing you want them to do for you; ideally, the result would be a win-win for both sides
- Thank them and request a response
- Include your full name, address, and other contact info

Cases for Investment in Mental Health

Investing in mental health care costs money, but there's actually a strong economic case for investing in mental health. Organizations in several different countries have crunched the data to put together a case, which can be useful to back up calls to government for action on mental health issues.

- Australian National Mental Health Commission: [The economic case for investing in mental health prevention: Summary](#)
- Centre for Mental Health (UK): [Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention: The economic case](#)
- Mental Health Commission of Canada:
 - [Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada](#)
 - [Strengthening the Case for Investing in Canada's Mental Health System: Economic Considerations](#)
- World Health Organization: [Investing in Mental Health: Evidence for Action](#)

Start Small

Are there small targets that you can set for yourself to take action? Maybe you can aim to support a couple of petitions every year, and write a couple of letters or emails to your elected officials.

There are a lot of people living with mental illness, which means a lot of voters. All of those voices can have an impact if enough of them are raised.

A Brief History of Stigma

A Brief History of Stigma has more information on what mental illness stigma is and what to do about it. You can learn more about the book on [Mental Health @ Home](#).

It's available on [Amazon](#) and [Google Play](#).

