



Recovery IS Beautiful is all about putting the needs of individuals and families requiring addiction and/or mental health programming first and foremost. In order to achieve this, *Recovery IS Beautiful* has two major components: 1) is all about changing the conversation, and 2) is all about moving Ohio's community mental health and addiction system, to a Recovery-Oriented System of Care. Ensuring that individuals have access to care is one thing. We must also work to get individuals and family members to want help and believe that treatment works and people recover. Additionally, we must address the stigma that continues to be associated with mental illness and addiction so that all members of the community support individuals in recovery.

Changing the Conversation

The *Recovery IS Beautiful* movement is working to provide individuals and families with hope and encouragement while changing the conversation throughout Ohio in regards to mental illness and addiction. We want people to know and understand that:

1. Mental illness and addiction are *chronic illnesses*;
2. Both mental illness and addiction can be treated - *treatment works and people recover*; and
3. *Recovery is to be celebrated* - individuals in recovery become active, contributing members of their communities!

Mental Illness and Addiction are Chronic Illnesses

Mental illness and addiction are both chronic illnesses. They are not moral failings or character weaknesses. The National Institute of Drug Abuse, a division of the National Institutes of Health, has defined addiction as a chronic, relapsing brain disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a mental illness is a medical condition that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning, and they are medical conditions that often result in diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life.

Mental illness and addiction are health conditions just like diabetes, cancer, or heart disease. And like diabetes, cancer, or heart disease the earlier you identify mental illness and/or addiction the more likely it is that individuals will recover and not have to experience all of the consequences of an untreated illness. Additionally, like the fore mentioned illnesses, mental illness and addiction are chronic illnesses that require a lifetime of diligence to manage.

Treatment Works and People Recover

Both mental illness and addiction are treatable chronic illnesses that require access to not only crisis and/or acute care, but also long-term recovery supports. Every person, when given access to the right treatment and supports, has the opportunity to recover. Recovery will not be the same for all individuals. The level and length of treatment and supports may vary greatly like treatment does for any other physical illness, such as cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. Recovery has many pathways and no two individuals will take the exact same path. What is important to note is that the path an individual chooses is not nearly as important as the fact that someone has chosen to embrace recovery. What a person needs is dependent on that person's illness, their overall level of health, their available life supports (such as housing, employment, social supports, etc.), and their chosen path to recovery.

“We’re done ignoring the drug addicted and the mentally ill in this state. We’re not going to save them all, but in the course of trying to save one person at a time, we not only change the world, we change ourselves.”

~Governor John R. Kasich at Ohio’s 2014 Symposium on Opiate Addiction

Recovery is to be Celebrated!

Just as we celebrate survivors of cancer, we need to celebrate individuals in recovery. If we don’t celebrate individuals in recovery, how will we ever get individuals who are experiencing issues with addiction and/or mental illness to ask for help or seek support? We must begin to break down the walls of stigma and celebrate recovery as wonderful and **BEAUTIFUL!**

Just as family members and breast cancer survivors initiated the pink ribbon campaign, we initiated the **Recovery IS Beautiful** campaign. We want people to know that individuals in recovery are to be celebrated, and that treatment works! We also want people to start talking about mental illness and addiction. People should not be afraid to ask questions or to admit that they have a problem. Furthermore, we want people to know that when individuals do recover they become valuable contributing members of their communities! And just like the pink ribbon campaign got women to think about getting mammograms and doing self-exams, we want individuals to know the warning signs of mental illness and substance abuse, know where and how to get help, and know who to talk to. We must take away the negativity and fear surrounding these two illnesses if we are ever to truly win the fight against the stigma that prevents individuals from getting help.

Why We Need to Change the Conversation

Now is the perfect time to look at how mental health and addiction services are being provided and what impact stigma has on the overall system of care. As the healthcare environment in Ohio changes and as Ohio looks to transform healthcare to be more effective and efficient, we must make sure that we are doing everything in our power to transform Ohio’s mental health and addiction services to ensure that individuals suffering from these illnesses are receiving the treatment and recovery supports they need. Additionally, one of the priorities of this transformation must be to reduce stigma and help people understand that mental illness and addiction are illnesses and must be addressed as such.

Stigma keeps people away from treatment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only 25 percent of people with mental health symptoms believe that people are caring and sympathetic toward someone living with a mental illness. And as stated in a viewpoint article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the understanding of opioid use disorder as a medical illness is still overshadowed by its misconception as a moral weakness or willful choice.

Eliminating the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and addiction is critical in truly moving these illnesses into the mainstream of healthcare, and in getting individuals who need help to feel comfortable in admitting that they have a health issue, want help and that with the appropriate treatment and recovery supports they can achieve recovery!

Recovery Is Beautiful

Recovery IS Beautiful is about **HOPE**, the hope that anyone can recover, and by working together we can make recovery not only possible but desirable! The **Recovery IS Beautiful** movement is committed to reducing and ultimately eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness and addiction, by changing the conversation, and by moving Ohio toward a true Recovery-Oriented System of Care. To this end, we need your help!

PLEASE join us in changing the conversation about mental illness and addiction, and help make recovery beautiful in your community and throughout Ohio.

To learn more go to RecoveryISBeautiful.org.
Follow us on Twitter at [RIB_ORG](https://twitter.com/RIB_ORG).