

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



Kayla Mudge
(401) 443-2803 ext. 308
kaylam@hari.org

HARI Educates More Than 50,000 Rhode Islanders on the Importance of Normalizing Mental Health Conversations

Providence, R.I. – June X, 2019 – The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) and the HARI Change Direction Steering Committee have recently released *The Campaign to Change Direction in Rhode Island: June 2019 Pledge Progress Report*. In May 2018, HARI [partnered](#) with the Office of Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo, Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Rhode Island Office of Veterans’ Affairs, The University of Rhode Island, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, and a multitude of community partners to lead the state in its efforts to promote the statewide rollout of The Campaign to Change Direction.

The Campaign to Change Direction is a coordinated public health initiative designed to help change the way we understand and value mental health through the use of a common language known as the “Five Signs of Emotional Suffering” – Change in Personality, Agitation, Withdrawal, Decline in Personal Care, and Hopelessness. “We need to learn to talk about our mental health, the same as we would our physical health. The Campaign encourages us to check in with one another and to listen without judgement” said HARI President Teresa Paiva Weed.

Behavioral health has been identified by a multitude of national and state reports as one of the state’s top health concerns. In Rhode Island, an annual average of about 37,000 adults aged 18 or older were reported by SAMHSA’s [Behavioral Health Barometer: Rhode Island, Volume 4](#) as having serious thoughts of suicide. In the past three years, the [2018 Annual Report](#) of America’s Health Rankings has identified Rhode Island as being the most challenged by the high prevalence of frequent mental distress, which has increased 34% from 10.9% to 14.6% of adults.

Since the May 2018 launch of the statewide initiative, HARI has participated in more than 80 community events and presentations. HARI Vice President of Strategy and Public Relations Lisa Tomasso and HARI Communications Coordinator Kayla Mudge have presented the Campaign to nearly every community in Rhode Island, presentations have ranged from small committees and councils to public school systems and conferences. “Our goal is to normalize mental health conversations in Rhode Island. Everyone has mental health, just like everyone has physical health. It is important that we come together as a community to support one another” said Mudge. To date, the Campaign has had a direct reach of more than 15,000 Rhode Islanders and an indirect reach of more than 50,000 Rhode Islanders. “Our reach is the result of a dedicated grassroots effort. We have spent little to no money on advertisement, instead we have focused on attending events that will allow us to speak directly to community members. The Campaign to Change Direction is a public health initiative that has successfully taken root in our state” said Tomasso.

###