

PRESS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

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

Rhode Island Pledges to “Change Direction” on Mental Health

Providence, R.I. – May 3, 2018 – The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) has partnered with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) to become the second state to launch The Campaign to Change Direction as a statewide initiative. The Campaign to Change Direction is a national public health initiative that aims to change the culture of mental health so that all in need receive the care they deserve.

The launch of the statewide initiative was announced at the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island’s (MHARI) Mental Health Month Kick-Off event at the Rhode Island State House. This year’s state Mental Health Month theme, “Whole Body + Whole Mind = Whole Health,” will focus on mental health and substance-abuse parity among insurance plans. “Although parity for mental health services has been established by law, implementation continues to be a challenge. So, MHARI is especially focused this year in seeing that persons with mental illness know their rights and have access to affordable, good quality care just like anyone else in need of medical services” stated MHARI Board of Directors President J. Clement Cicilline.

The event was hosted by MHARI. Barbara Morse Silva, health reporter and anchor for WJAR-TV NBC 10, was the event emcee. Governor Gina Raimondo, Honorary Chair of the Kick-Off Event, Department of Health Director Nicole Alexander-Scott MD, MPH, Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals Director Rebecca Boss, Department of Children, Youth and Families Director Trista Piccola, and Health Insurance Commissioner Marie Ganim PhD, as well as representatives of MHARI and members of the audience all took the pledge to Change Direction.

HARI President Teresa Paiva Weed announced the official launch of the Campaign to Change Direction as a statewide initiative. “Our goal is to familiarize every Rhode Islander with the ‘Five Signs of Emotional Suffering’ – an easy to use tool that is designed for us to recognize the signs of emotional suffering in ourselves as well as our loved ones.”

“The Campaign to Change Direction will be a critical part of our work to change the culture of mental health in Rhode Island. The Campaign will help us get support and care to those who need it in a way that is affirming, compassionate, consistent, and effective,” said RI Department of Health Director Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH. “In the same way that we are taught to look for the symptoms of a stroke or a heart attack, understanding the signs that someone may be dealing with a mental health challenge, and knowing how to react, are ways that we can *all* act to promote comprehensive health and wellness. Everyone has a role to play in building healthy communities in Rhode Island.”

“We are pleased that mental health wellness is being brought into the public dialogue,” said RI Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals Director Rebecca Boss. “Many people living with mental illness won’t ask for help because of the negative perception associated with it. We believe the Campaign to Change Direction will help fight this perception that is prevalent in our culture and will encourage people who are struggling to come forward and ask for help. The Campaign is the first step in creating the opportunity for open discussions about mental illness to improve understanding of this disease, its impact on individuals and families, and increase access to treatment and supports needed for recovery.”

“We are so proud of our partnership with HARI – and thrilled that Rhode Island is adopting the Campaign to Change Direction” said Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, President and Founder of Give an Hour, the backbone organization behind the Campaign to Change Direction. “It’s time to change the way we think about, talk about and address mental health, mental illness and emotional well-being so that those in need receive the care and support they deserve. Working with communities across Rhode Island, we will Change Direction!”

Last fall, Landmark Medical Center – a HARI member hospital, became the first organization in Rhode Island to take the pledge to Change Direction. Over the next year, HARI and its members will work with RIDOH, BHDDH, and community partners to change the culture of mental health in Rhode Island. This will be accomplished through a statewide distribution and promotion of Campaign materials, as well as participation in community events. A steering committee, led by some of the state’s leaders in mental health, will be convened once a month to discuss how the message of the Campaign can be effectively promoted in Rhode Island.

The Campaign to Change Direction, a public health initiative focused on changing the culture of mental health, encourages everyone to care for their mental well-being just as they do their physical well-being. The campaign is led by Give an Hour, a US based nonprofit organization providing free mental health services to those in need including our military and veteran community. Change Direction addresses common barriers to understanding mental health and raises awareness about the Five Signs of Emotional Suffering that may indicate someone is in emotional pain and needs help: change in personality, agitation, withdrawal, decline in personal care, and hopelessness. Over 600 partner organizations are using their unique skills and opportunities to spread awareness. Organizations and individuals who are interested in learning more or making a pledge can visit www.changedirection.org.

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Pictures of the launch event are available upon request.