

# Four Tips to Improve Mental Health During BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month

July's BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month is an observance dedicated to raising awareness about the unique mental health challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This month emphasizes the importance of culturally competent mental health care and aims to address the disparities in mental health services and outcomes among these communities.

In this Q&A, Magellan Health's Eric A. Williams, Ph.D., LCMHCS, LMFT, LPC, and Stephanie White, LMFT, regional supervisors for the Military and Family Life Counselor program, share four ways BIPOC can improve their mental health.

**Q: What advice would you give to BIPOC individuals seeking to improve their mental health and well-being?**

**Dr. Eric Williams:**

## **#1 Prioritize Self-Care**

How you treat yourself reflects your relationship with yourself. This includes your diet, sleep hygiene, social support system, and spirituality. Here are a few strategies to prioritize your self-care:

- **Body:** Get regular medical and dental check-ups. Engage in regular physical activity, eat a balanced diet, and get enough sleep. Lastly, take prescription medications as prescribed.
- **Mind:** Ensure a healthy balance of mass media, social media, and other uplifting sources of information. This

doesn't mean you have to give up your social media accounts, but it does mean you emphasize being exposed to information that supports your mental well-being. This could include practicing relaxation techniques like meditation or deep breathing, reading, learning a new skill, or spending time in nature.

- **Spirit:** Consider establishing a personal vision reflective of your values and purpose in life. Spend time with loved ones, practice gratitude, and engage in activities that nourish your sense of meaning.

## **#2 Build Strong Connections with Family and Friends**

Strong social connections are essential for mental well-being.

- **Nurture existing relationships:** Intentionally create time for friends and family who support you and make you feel good. Don't be afraid to set boundaries with people who drain your energy or contribute to negativity in your life.
- **Expand your social circle:** Join clubs, or sports leagues (i.e., bowling, softball, etc.), volunteer in community organizations to include church and other non-profit organizations, or take classes to connect with people who share your interests.

## **#3 Seek Professional Help if Needed**

You may experience racial discrimination, stresses and microaggressions, which can influence your emotional well-being in ways these tips may not address. Don't hesitate to reach out for professional help if you're struggling. Finding a therapist or counselor who understands your cultural background is important. Look for therapists who identify as BIPOC themselves or have experience working with BIPOC communities.

**Stephanie White:**

## **#4 Practice Self-Affirming Habits for Adults and Children**

I highly recommend a personal habit of affirming your color and appearance through meditation and self-care. Take good care of your coils and strands, your health, and your heart. For our youth, I also recommend that we embrace and build a collection of literature that is directed toward children of color, celebrating their uniqueness as well as their belonging.

For more information to increase awareness about BIPOC mental health and wellbeing and the importance of recognizing and addressing concerns, visit [MagellanHealthcare.com/BIPOC-MH](https://MagellanHealthcare.com/BIPOC-MH).

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# **Cultivating culture, community and connection to support BIPOC**

Creating inclusive communities where Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) feel a sense of belonging and support is important to their wellbeing. Research shows individuals with strong social connections are 50% more likely to live longer and have a better chance of preventing serious illnesses like heart disease, stroke, dementia, anxiety and depression.

**Here are five ways you can connect with BIPOC to cultivate culture, community and connection.**

- 1. Explore the values, beliefs and traditions of diverse cultures:** Exploring BIPOC articles, books, documentaries, cultural museums, languages or cuisines

can cultivate respect, empathy and inclusivity.

2. **Seek authentic connections:** Build meaningful BIPOC relationships by finding common ground, personally and professionally. Genuine cultural connections can emerge from supportive neighboring, discussing shared interests or embracing diverse perspectives to achieve common goals.
3. **Engage in community activities:** Volunteer to support the BIPOC community by assisting at events or with organizations serving BIPOC populations.
4. **Promote services and resources that help BIPOC communities:** Sharing information about services, resources and job opportunities online or through personal networks can aid BIPOC communities significantly.
5. **Support BIPOC organizations:** Strengthen community ties and show commitment to BIPOC concerns by supporting BIPOC organizations. This can include buying from local BIPOC businesses, amplifying their voices on social media and advocating for BIPOC needs in civic forums.

Together, we can build a more inclusive and supportive community for all. Every action counts in fostering culture, community, connection and BIPOC wellbeing.

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## SOURCES:

- [Human Connection: Why It's Important | Psych Central](#)
- [Social Connection | CDC](#)

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# **Spotlight Magellan Health: June is National PTSD Awareness Month!**

Recognizing National Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month is crucial for raising public awareness about PTSD. This observance fosters understanding of symptoms, reduces stigma, and encourages those suffering to seek help. By promoting education and support, we can improve lives and support recovery efforts, ensuring that those affected receive the care they need. Magellan Health's Dr. Yasmeen Benjamin, psychologist advisor, shares her thoughts on the importance of recognizing National PTSD Awareness Month, and what available resources there are to support the mental health of individuals living with PTSD.



## **What are some facts about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that individuals may not be aware of?**

The triggering event or stressor that causes PTSD can look very different for everyone. However, for all those who struggle with PTSD, the symptoms are the same. This is important because sometimes individuals with PTSD don't know they have PTSD, or they will minimize their symptoms if they deem their trauma to be less severe in some way.

The symptoms of PTSD consist of re-experiencing the traumatic event in some way, avoidance, negative changes in thoughts and mood, and increased arousal or reactivity. To have a diagnosis of PTSD means these symptoms will cause significant distress

in an individual's life and persist following the traumatic event. It is also important to recognize that PTSD can negatively affect many aspects of a person's life, which makes living with PTSD very difficult and isolating. Relationships can suffer as well as performance in a work or school environment. But there is hope to manage PTSD with scientifically proven treatments, such as evidence-based therapies. I am a believer in these treatments because I have seen first-hand how they work to significantly decrease symptoms and help individuals get their lives back. These treatments include, but aren't limited to, Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy. I highly encourage anyone experiencing PTSD to discuss these and other PTSD treatment options with a clinician who is well-trained in them.

## **Why is it important to recognize National PTSD Awareness Month?**

PTSD affects many different types of people of all ages and backgrounds. Given that this condition doesn't discriminate, it's important to understand PTSD and to be able to identify the signs and symptoms so we could be a support to those individuals with this condition. Social support is an important variable in any recovery process and can be a huge help for individuals living with PTSD to receive that understanding and empathy needed to help them.

## **What are some available resources for individuals with PTSD?**

The [National Center for PTSD](#) provides helpful resources and psycho-educational materials to individuals with PTSD as well as their family and friends. Additionally, there are helpful books and workbooks that individuals can read to learn more about their symptoms as well as learn helpful skills to better manage or decrease PTSD symptoms.

## What are some ways that individuals with PTSD can take care of their mental health while navigating this condition?

PTSD does not have to feel like a lifetime sentence. With the right treatment, people can get their lives back. I highly encourage individuals with PTSD to find professionals who have the training and experience to effectively treat this condition. Additionally, I encourage individuals with PTSD to find a way to not only address their mental health, but also address their spiritual and physical health as well. PTSD affects the entire being.

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## Use Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to Address Your Mental Health

If you have ever reached out to a therapist or the community for mental health support, you may relate to the frustration that many individuals feel. The healthcare system is experiencing more demands for access to care, and the mental health industry is no different.

Here are some of the common obstacles to getting mental healthcare:

1. **Stigma:** Fear of judgment can result in individuals choosing not to seek out help.
2. **Cost:** Even with insurance coverage, deductibles have risen, and paying out of pocket is challenging for many people.
3. **Provider shortage:** A shortage of mental health providers

in many areas leads to longer wait times for appointments. As a result, individuals may give up on looking for a provider after one or more failed attempts.

4. **Time and transportation:** Getting to and from appointments is often time-consuming, and many cannot afford to take time away from other personal or work responsibilities. In addition to scheduling conflicts, transportation challenges are also often a barrier to seeking help.
5. **Mistrust:** Having or knowing someone who has had negative experiences with mental health providers (or healthcare in general) can lead to avoidant behavior.

### **The EAP as a Mental Health Resource**

If you are a federal government employee or are employed by one of the millions of private employers who offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you are in luck. Your EAP is here to help you overcome these common obstacles by offering free, convenient, and confidential mental health support.

Magellan Federal partners with 296 federal agencies to offer a comprehensive EAP that includes short-term solution-focused counseling services. We continuously work with our clients and providers to eliminate the barriers associated with accessing mental healthcare. We collaborate across various teams and contract agreements to provide resources and quick, reliable care. Here's how we break down the barriers to mental healthcare.

- Referrals are always voluntary and confidential, easing the stigma and fear of coming forward for help.
- EAP provides free counseling sessions with no co-pay or deductible.
- Many EAPs offer a variety of virtual counseling options, which reduce delays in appointment scheduling.
- Employees can often schedule directly with an EAP



provider at their convenience, either via the website's online scheduling links or through a find-help function .

- The Magellan Federal EAP call center answers calls in less than 30 seconds, eliminating the frustration of being transferred or put on hold.
- The call center is staffed with clinical experts who remove any guesswork and connect the caller with appropriate referrals and resources.
- The employer EAP website provides current information and provides reliable resources.
- When requested by a manager, health and wellness presentations are readily available to promote self-awareness and self-care and introduce individuals to available services.
- Virtual counseling sessions reduce transportation and scheduling conflicts. This modality can also decrease the stigma some people may feel if seen walking into a counselor's office.
- EAP services often promote coping skills, resiliency, and resource use. These skills may lessen or prevent a mental health crisis in the future.

The Magellan Federal EAP eliminates common challenges associated with accessing mental health support and continues to implement new operations that improve care. Consider using your EAP as an alternative to paying out of pocket for quality mental health services. Your well-being—and wallet—will thank you!

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## Resources

- [Exploring Barriers to Mental Health Care in the U.S. | Research and Action Institute \(aamcresearchinstitute.org\)](https://www.aamcresearchinstitute.org), by Hemangi Modi, former

Analyst, AAMC Research and Action Institute; Kendal Orgera, MPH, MPP, Senior Research Analyst, AAMC Research and Action Institute; and [Atul Grover, MD, PhD](#), Executive Director, AAMC Research and Action Institute.

- [Study Reveals Lack of Access as Root Cause for Mental Health Crisis in America – National Council for Mental Wellbeing \(thenationalcouncil.org\)](#), National Council for Wellbeing

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## Spotlight Magellan Health: World Schizophrenia Awareness Day is May 24!

World Schizophrenia Awareness Day is a vital reminder of the profound impact this complex mental health condition has on individuals and families worldwide. This day offers a platform to challenge stigmas, dispel myths, and advocate for greater understanding and support for those affected by schizophrenia. By acknowledging World Schizophrenia Awareness Day, we're highlighting the need for improved access to mental health resources and service and taking a crucial step towards fostering inclusive communities and promoting mental well-being. Magellan Health's Lyle Forehand, MD, is board certified in psychiatry and forensic psychiatry. Dr. Forehand shares his thoughts on the importance of recognizing World Schizophrenia Day, and what available resources there are to support the mental health of individuals living with schizophrenia.



## **What is some information about schizophrenia that people may not know?**

Schizophrenia is a very serious, lifelong condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. It shows up differently in different people, but it is almost always associated with decreased insight into what is, or is not, real. Usually starting between ages 16 and 30-years-old, individuals tend to respond better to earlier treatment. However, people who suffer with these symptoms are often very unwilling to share their scary, and often bizarre, experiences with others. That slows down, or even prevents, getting treatment. Many also have a neurological condition called anosognosia, that blocks their ability to know they are ill or need treatment.

## **Why is it important to recognize World Schizophrenia Day?**

World Schizophrenia Awareness Day is celebrated every May 24th, in honor of the day in 1792 that Dr. Phillipe Pinel started releasing psychiatric patients from the chains that bound them at the Bicêtre Hospital outside Paris. Many of his patients had been chained for 30 – 40 years! Our hope, in recognizing this day, is that the stigma of schizophrenia (and of mental disorders in general) will lessen. More people will be able to live with dignity and with access to the same level of care as individuals without schizophrenia.

## **What are some available resources for individuals with schizophrenia?**

Information is helpful in managing most difficulties. For schizophrenia, which is often quite scary to those who suffer from the condition and to those who love them, this is even more important. NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, has been a source of information and support since 1979. The Treatment Advocacy Center, founded in 1998, has

been controversial because of its advocacy for forced treatment of some people with schizophrenia, but it remains a great information resource as well as a vigorous advocate of legal changes that could enhance treatment.

Schizophrenia requires lifelong treatment. That treatment should include some amount of medication. Not all psychiatrists are comfortable prescribing these medicines, but many are willing to work with schizophrenic patients until a regimen can be found that works well for them. These regimens often change over time, or in response to fluctuations in stress, or symptoms, or both. A good relationship with a consistent provider is very important. A relationship with a full-service team is even better. This team can provide some combination of psychotherapy, social skills training, vocational rehabilitation, supported housing, and supported employment.

### **What are some ways that individuals with schizophrenia can take care of their mental health while navigating this condition?**

Just as everyone else does, people with schizophrenia have some amount of stress (not just from their disorder!) and some amount of resilience (the ability to “bounce back” from difficulties). Resilience is a skill that all of us can improve. The four steps are: making positive lifestyle choices, forming positive social relationships, having a sense of meaning and/or purpose, and the practice of mindfulness/meditation (even just three minutes a day).

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# Operation Warfighter: Career Transition Assistance for Wounded Warriors

For many Service members, dealing with an injury or illness can change the entire trajectory of their career paths, leaving them unsure of their future. According to the Government Accountability Office, over 200,000 military personnel leave the military annually. While most of these Service members leave on their own terms, many leave for medical reasons caused by their active-duty service. What happens when a military career ends unexpectedly and how do we take care of our recovering Service members?

## Military Transition Challenges

In addition to experiencing anxiety and uncertainty around a new civilian career, some additional challenges veterans may experience with transitioning from military life to civilian life include:

**Health Concerns:** Health is a top concern for veterans after separating from military service. A Veterans Affairs study found that 53% of participants reported having chronic physical health conditions within three months of leaving the military. Additionally, mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may worsen during this period.

- **Identity Reevaluation:** The abrupt end of a military career can lead to a profound identity crisis. Veterans may struggle with defining their sense of purpose and self-worth outside the military.
- **Navigating Services:** Veterans transitioning out of the military may need to learn how to access civilian

services such as healthcare, life insurance, and other benefits. These services were previously provided by the military, so adjusting to the new system can be challenging.

- **Social Network Changes:** Leaving the military means losing the built-in social network that comes with military life. Veterans may find it difficult to establish new connections and maintain a sense of camaraderie.
- **Employment:** While most veterans successfully transition into civilian jobs, others face difficulties in finding suitable employment. Adjusting to a different work environment and culture can be a significant challenge.
- **Paperwork and Benefits:** Navigating the paperwork and processes involved in obtaining benefits and services from the Department of Veterans Affairs can be overwhelming. Veterans may need assistance in understanding their entitlements and how to access them.

## **Navigating the Transition to Civilian Employment**

Magellan Federal helps solve the problems of Service members transitioning from the military to the civilian sector. Operation Warfighter (OWF) is a Department of Defense (DoD) internship program that provides opportunities for recovering Service members to participate in internships with Federal agencies during their medical board and rehabilitation process.

The main objective of OWF is to place recovering Service members in supportive work settings that positively impact their recovery. The program presents opportunities to facilitate the recovering Service members' development and employment readiness by assisting in providing comprehensive resources that assist them with their transition and support their needs. This is done through resume building, exploring

employment interests, and developing job skills through internship opportunities. Currently, there are over 533 participating Federal agencies that accept OWF interns.

## **Building Skills for a Civilian Career**

Magellan's Regional Coordinators (RCs) work with the recovering Service members to help identify areas of interest and hone in on transferable skills along with soft skills they have gained through their military service. Our Regional Coordinators coach them on how to build resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and make suggestions to assist them in learning how to navigate a civilian workforce setting. Our Regional Coordinators partner with all branches of service and work closely with Transition Coordinators, Recovery Care Coordinators, Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officers, Command Teams, Medical Providers, and Individual Disability Evaluation System staff to ensure participation is in the best interest of the recovering Service member.

The average Medical Board process lasts between 180 days (about 6 months) to 1 year. The OWF program is a valuable experience that lasts between 90 and 120 days (about 4 months). Participation in OWF can positively impact recovery time, provide valuable work experience in a non-military environment, and assist with developing new skills while providing benefits of career preparedness upon transition to civilian life.

All OWF Regional Coordinators have personal experience as military spouses or have served in the military themselves. They understand the military lifestyle and culture, and the stress surrounding transitioning out of the service.

## **Getting Started**

Operation Warfighter Regional Coordinators are in 10 different regions throughout the United States. These individuals work

with wounded, ill, and injured Service members at all military installations. A Service member can participate in OWF if they are on active duty and meet the basic criteria of being enrolled in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) and/or assigned to a service Wounded Warrior program. The first step in the OWF process is to obtain “medical and command approval” from the Service member’s recovery team and chain of command. Once they are determined to be ready to participate, a Regional Coordinator assists the individual in identifying an internship opportunity based on their interests and capabilities.

The Operation Warfighter program is a wonderful opportunity for Service members to get real-world work experience to ease the transition to civilian life. Magellan Federal is proud to deliver OWF services that make a difference in the lives of recovering Service members around the nation.

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## **Enhancing Soldier Wellness and Performance**

As our understanding of soldier wellness evolves, it’s clear that a comprehensive approach is essential. In today’s military landscape, physical fitness alone isn’t enough – mental toughness is equally crucial. The [U.S. Army Combatives Program](#) serves as a prime platform to nurture this mental resilience, offering Soldiers a pathway to peak performance both on and off the battlefield.

The U.S. Army Combatives Program, which includes hand-to-hand combat training, offers a valuable avenue to promote mental well-being and overall performance among soldiers. Beyond its



traditional role in honing physical combat skills, this program has evolved to encompass a broader mission – one that emphasizes the cultivation of mental resilience as a cornerstone of soldier effectiveness.

### **Building Mental Resilience**

The benefit of combat sports is that they cultivate mental toughness like no other. Soldiers are pushed to their limits, not just physically but mentally, fostering adaptability, perseverance, and a steadfast attitude in the face of adversity. Studies, such as those published in the Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, underscore combat sports' profound impact on enhancing mental toughness – a cornerstone of soldier effectiveness in high-stress environments.

### **Fostering Unity within Units**

Engaging in combat sports brings Soldiers together uniquely and intensely. It strengthens team members' bonds, trust, and camaraderie, enhancing unit cohesion and morale. A 2020 study in the Journal of Military, Veteran, and Family Health found that Soldiers who participated in combatives training reported higher levels of cohesion and teamwork – vital components for mission success.

### **Providing an Outlet for Frustration and Stress**

The rigors of military life often lead to pent-up frustration and stress. The Combatives Program provides Soldiers with a constructive outlet to channel these emotions. By engaging in controlled physical exertion, soldiers can mitigate stress and avoid detrimental coping mechanisms. Studies, such as those in the Journal of Military Psychology, affirm the therapeutic benefits of combat sports in stress management among military personnel.

### **Integration of Mental Performance Consultants**

To unlock the full potential of combative training, the integration of mental performance consultants is paramount. These specialists offer soldiers cognitive tools and strategies to optimize their performance in combat and everyday life. From stress management to enhancing focus and resilience, mental performance consultants provide a holistic approach to soldier wellness.

### **Improving Decision-Making Under Stress**

In high-stakes scenarios, split-second decisions can mean the difference between success and failure. Research in Military Psychology underscores how combat sports improve decision-making under stress. Mental performance consultants further refine this skill, equipping soldiers with the mental fortitude to think critically and act decisively in the heat of battle.

### **Enhancing Recovery and Resilience**

Injuries and setbacks are a part of military life, and mental resilience is crucial for recovery. Mental performance consultants can guide soldiers in maintaining a positive mindset during rehabilitation, reducing the psychological impact of injuries, and facilitating a quicker return to peak performance. The U.S. Army Combatives Program offers a wealth of mental benefits essential for Soldier wellness and performance. By fostering mental toughness, unit cohesion, and stress management, this program contributes significantly to Soldier readiness.

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# Youth Mental Health: Five Tips to Support Young Minds

Mental health plays an important role in the overall wellbeing of youth. Child behaviors and emotions can change frequently and rapidly, making it difficult for parents and teachers to detect mental, behavioral or emotional concerns right away. Studies find an estimated 70-80% of children with mental health disorders go without care.

## How can you nurture the mental health of your child?

Consider the following strategies to support your child's mental wellbeing:

1. **Be intentional and attuned.** Beyond just paying attention to verbal and nonverbal cues, actively engage in open communication with your child. Create a safe space where they feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions. Additionally, educate yourself about typical developmental stages and common mental health concerns in youth, so you can better identify when your child might need support.
2. **Foster closeness.** Building a strong emotional bond with your child involves not only empathy but also active listening and validation of their experiences. Spend quality time together engaging in activities they enjoy and show genuine interest in their hobbies and concerns. By demonstrating unconditional love and acceptance, you're fostering an environment where they feel valued and understood.
3. **Encourage connections.** In addition to nurturing relationships within the family, encourage your child to form connections with peers and mentors. Support their participation in extracurricular activities or community events where they can develop social skills and a sense

of belonging. Positive social interactions provide a buffer against stress and can enhance resilience in the face of challenges.

4. **Model good behavior.** As a parent or caregiver, your actions speak louder than words. Model healthy coping mechanisms for managing stress and emotions, such as practicing mindfulness, seeking support from loved ones, and engaging in hobbies or relaxation techniques. By demonstrating how to navigate difficult situations effectively, you're equipping your child with valuable tools for their own emotional wellbeing.
5. **Make healthy choices.** Emphasize the importance of self-care and overall wellness by prioritizing healthy habits as a family. Maintain a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limit sugary or processed foods. Encourage regular physical activity and outdoor play, as exercise is linked to improved mood and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Establish consistent bedtime routines to ensure adequate sleep, as insufficient rest can exacerbate mental health concerns.

Youth mental health concerns are real, common and treatable. By implementing these strategies, you're not only fostering a supportive environment for your child's mental health but also empowering them with the skills and resources needed to navigate life's challenges effectively.

While some problems are short-lived and don't need treatment, others are ongoing and may be very serious. If you are concerned about changes in behavior or other symptoms, consult your child's doctor. Remember, seeking professional help when needed is a sign of strength, and early intervention can make a significant difference in managing mental health concerns.

Visit [MagellanHealthcare.com/about/bh-resources](https://MagellanHealthcare.com/about/bh-resources) for more mental health information and resources.

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## Source

- [CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH – 2022 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report – NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#)