



Vermont Department of Mental Health
**MENTAL HEALTH
 AWARENESS MONTH**

Week Three 2022

Purpose is a Key Component of Wellness

Having a purposeful life is associated with mental and physical wellbeing, including but not limited to less stress, more happiness, and a [longer lifespan](#). It's never too late to increase your sense of purpose

According to psychologist Dr. Simon Goldberg, there are three key factors to purpose:



Social Connections are Especially Critical to Older Vermonters

Last week's [newsletter](#) centered around the importance of social connections. As we age, having meaning and purpose becomes more critical to reducing risk of social isolation and increasing life expectancy. The [2021 Senior Health Rankings Report](#) identified that there was an 11% increase (from 71% to 79%) in Vermonters' access to high-speed internet between 2016 and 2019 for households with an older adult. Other key findings of the 2021 Senior Health Rankings Report identified strengths and challenges for Vermonters:

Strengths	Challenges
Low Poverty Rate	High Prevalence of Falls
low prevalence of multiple chronic conditions	Low Percentage Of Hospice Care Use
high prevalence of exercise	High Prevalence of Severe Housing Problems



The way that we talk about aging matters. Below is a reminder from our partners at the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living about terms to use and avoid.

Engourage These Words/Phrases	Avoid These Words/Phrases
Older Vermonter/Older Person or People	Elderly/Senior/Senior Citizen
We/All Of Us (Inclusive)	They/Them (Othering)
Accumulation of Wisdom/Knowledge/ Experience	Decline/Deterioration/Loss
Problem Solving (Sense of Ingenuity)	Nothing Can be Done (Sense of Fatalism)
Changing Demographics	Silver Tsunami
Building Momentum	Getting Old/Battling Aging

Happening Now!



May 16th is Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day. The National Council on Aging will be hosting the [5th Annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium](#). This free event will include a range of topics and speakers related to mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention.



Vermont residents 60+ now have free access to [GetSetUp's live interactive classes](#) taught by older adults for older adults to make digital learning, connection, and exploration a reality. There are a wide variety of classes which include everything from fitness workouts and cooking classes to courses which explain iPhone basics and how to host Zoom meetings.

Resources that we encourage you to explore on the topic of aging:

- ◆ [Depression is Not a Normal Part of Growing Older](#)
- ◆ [Reframing Aging](#)
- ◆ [Aging and Medication](#)
- ◆ [Senior Report from America's Health Rankings](#)
- ◆ [Aging and Alcohol](#)

Employment Can Give Us Purpose and Improve Our Mental Health

Not everyone may associate working with having a purpose. More often, work is associated with paying the bills.

How many times have you heard someone else, or even yourself, mention that work is stressful or standing in the way of more important activities? We often neglect to see how [work actually contributes to our well-being](#). Working, even in a stressful job, is more beneficial for our mental and physical health, than not working. [Being unemployed is harmful to our health](#). Employment provides us with connection to others, structure in our days, income, and enhanced self-esteem. Employment also gives us purpose.

The connection between employment and mental health is becoming a more prominent topic. We know that [50% of us will experience a mental health challenge](#) in our lifetime. Employers are learning that they need to support their employees' whole health, including mental health, or [risk losing them](#). Ways to offer support include raising awareness, providing education and training, supporting wellness, and creating a culture of acceptance. Employee conversations about mental health are leading to increased opportunities for support. Employment can even save lives and [when working in the right job](#), people can move from surviving to thriving.





For more information on ways to support mental health, either your own or your employees, consider these resources:

- ◆ [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- ◆ [What Can I Do to Promote Mental Health at Work?](#)
- ◆ [John Hopkins Total Worker Health Center](#)
- ◆ [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- ◆ [Workplace Mental Health Promotion](#)
- ◆ [Supporting MH at Work](#)

Vermont's Department of Mental Health recognizes the importance of employment for all people and continues to support the efforts of the community mental health centers to provide an employment practice called [Evidence-Based Supported Employment](#) to help adults with a mental health disorder, and the [JOBS program](#) to help youth with obtaining meaningful employment of their choice. If you or someone you know is interested in pursuing education, employment, or a career change, there are [additional services and supports](#) available.

5 Ways To Create A Culture Of Openness At Work Around Mental Health



1

**Awareness Is
The First Step**



2

**Demonstrate
Vulnerability To
Help Create A
Culture Of Trust**



3

**Be Comfortable
Discussing Mental
Health At Work**



4

**Don't Make
Assumptions**



5

**Provide
Reasonable Job
Accommodations**

Selfless Acts Matter, No Matter How Small They May Be

"Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem, empathy and compassion, and improve mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a stress hormone, which directly impacts stress levels. People who give of themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer... Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain. Being kind boosts serotonin and dopamine, which are neurotransmitters in the brain that give you feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and cause the pleasure/reward centers in your brain to light up. Endorphins, which are your body's natural pain killer, also can be released."

Steve Siegle

Suggestions on ways to make kindness a regular practice in your life:

- Send someone a handwritten thank you note
- Have a conversation with a colleague you don't normally talk to
- Praise a colleague for something they have done well
- On Social Media, acknowledge and validate someone's story – if they are having a difficult time you don't have to have all the answers, sometimes a like or a brief 'I'm sorry to hear this, is there something I can do?' is enough to make them feel heard
- Tell your family how much you love and appreciate them
- Volunteer for a local community organization
- Check in with yourself about your limits and abilities- after all, you can't pour from an empty cup

For more suggestions and information, check out [The Art of Kindness](#).














DMH Standing Committees Offer the Opportunity to Give Back to the System of Care and Build Social Connections.

The State Program Standing Committees on Mental Health are advisory committees to the Department of Mental Health (DMH) appointed by the Governor. These committees evaluate and make recommendations to the DMH Commissioner and leadership team on a variety of topics related to mental health including access to services, wait times in Emergency Departments, housing, and respite services.

The committees also conduct redesignation reviews of each of the twelve designated and specialized service mental health agencies across Vermont. DMH gives the committee regular updates regarding a broad spectrum of mental health related issues to keep members informed. If you are interested in attending or joining the Adult or Youth & Family committee, please contact Eva Dayon at Eva.Dayon@vermont.gov. More information on [State Standing Committees](#) is available here.

Adult Mental Health State Program Standing Committee Top Ten Priorities 2021

-  **1. Housing**
-  **2. Reducing Emergency Departments as mental health “parking lots”**
-  **3. Law enforcement response during a mental health crisis**
-  **4. Suicide Prevention**
-  **5. Crisis / drop in centers**
-  **6. Normalize recovery, reduce stigma/discrimination**
-  **7. Normalize and expand peer work**
-  **8. Expand Soteria model**
-  **9. Reduce isolation and increase health relationships**
- 10. Other crisis interventions:**
 -  Expand VT support line hours
 -  Increase crisis intervention trainings

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross