



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

February 14, 2013

2013-R-0125

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

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This report provides a brief overview of the Mental Health First Aid USA training course and federal legislation recently introduced to increase access to this type of training.

SUMMARY

[Mental Health First Aid USA](#) (MHFA) is a 12-hour certification course that helps individuals identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use conditions. Based on an Australian program created in 2001, MHFA is managed by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NCCBH), the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health.

The course teaches people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and support the person in crisis until appropriate professional help arrives. Since its introduction in 2008, more than 87,172 people have been trained across the country, including 1,441 Connecticut residents. Participants include health care professionals, first responders, law enforcement, educators, and the general public, among others.

MHFA is taught in local communities by certified instructors who must complete a five-day certification program through the NCCBH. There are currently 24 certified instructors in Connecticut that have administered 104 trainings, mostly in Bridgeport, Plainville, New Haven, Meriden, Milford, Stamford, and Waterbury. The cost is determined by the instructor, and generally ranges between \$15 and \$200 per person.

Congress is currently considering two bills ([S.B. 153](#) and [H.R. 274](#)) that would authorize funding for grants to states, Indian tribes, and tribal and nonprofit organizations to initiate and sustain mental health first aid training programs such as MHFA.

MHFA TRAINING

Background

In 2008, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NCCBH), the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health formed a collaborative to bring MHFA to the United States. The program originated in Australia in 2001 and has since been replicated in Cambodia, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong, Ireland, Scotland, Singapore and Wales.

Like traditional first aid, the goal of MHFA is to train people to assist a person experiencing an emergency situation. But, instead of teaching someone how to administer CPR or first aid, MHFA teaches people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and support the person in crisis until appropriate professional help arrives.

Training Content

MHFA is a 12-hour, interactive certification course that provides an overview of mental health and substance use conditions as well as their risk factors, warning signs, impact, and common treatments. Specifically, participants learn:

1. potential risk factors and warning signs for mental health and substance use conditions, including depression, anxiety, trauma, psychosis, eating disorders, and self-injury;
2. the prevalence of various mental health conditions and the need for reduced stigma in their communities;
3. evidence-based resources available to help someone with a mental health issue; and

4. a five-step action plan to help a person assess risk or harm, listen non-judgmentally, and identify appropriate professional help and other supports.

Participants vary widely and include primary and long-term care professionals, law enforcement and first responders, school personnel and educators, employers, faith communities, mental health advocacy organizations, state policymakers, and the general public.

Instructor Certification

MHFA is taught in local communities by certified instructors. All instructors must complete a five-day instructor certification program through the NCCBH. Instructors are often staff members of behavioral health provider organizations, local and state mental health agencies, or mental health advocacy organizations.

According to NCCBH, there are 24 certified instructors in Connecticut that have administered 104 MHFA trainings for 1,441 participants. Most courses are offered in Bridgeport, Meriden, Milford, New Haven, Plainville, Stamford, and Waterbury. Table 1 lists NCCBH member organizations currently offering MHFA training.

Table 1: Connecticut NCCBH Member Organizations Offering MHFA Training

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Location</i>
APT Foundation	1 Long Wharf Dr. New Haven, CT 06511
Bridges Milford	949 Bridgeport Ave. Milford, CT 06460
Community Mental Health Affiliates	270 John Downey Dr. New Britain, CT 06051
Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center	400 Columbus Ave. New Haven, CT 06511
Rushford Center	883 Paddock Ave. Meriden, CT 06450
United Services, Inc.	1007 North Main St. Dayville, CT 06241
Wheeler Clinic	91 Northwest Dr. Plainville, CT 06062

Source: National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

Cost

According to NCCBH, the cost of the MHFA training course is determined by the instructor and can range anywhere from \$15 to \$200, depending on the fees the instructor incurs (most are offered for under \$100). States use different resources to pay for the training, such as private donations or state and federal mental health funds. NCCBH notes that one cost-effective way to train people is for an agency to have an employee complete the MHFA instructor training program. Once an agency has its own instructor, it does not have to pay for the instructor's time, which comprises the majority of the training cost.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

In January 2013, Representative Ron Barber (D-AZ) introduced, "The Mental Health First Act of 2013" ([H.R. 274](#)). The bill creates a grant program for states, Indian tribes, and tribal and nonprofit organizations to initiate and sustain mental health first aid training programs for:

1. emergency service personnel and other first responders;
2. police officers and other law enforcement personnel;
3. teachers and school administrators;
4. human resources professionals;
5. faith community leaders;
6. nurses and other primary care personnel;
7. primary, secondary, and post-secondary students and their parents;
8. veterans; and
9. other individuals determined by the federal Department of Health and Human Services Secretary.

The bill authorizes \$20 million in fiscal year (FY) 2014 and additional funds necessary in FYs 2015 and 2016 for these grants. The U.S. Senate is considering similar legislation ([S.B. 153](#)) introduced by Sen. Mark Begich (AK).

RESOURCES

H.R. 274, “The Mental Health First Act of 2013,”
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d113:274:./list/bss/d113HR.lst:>, last visited on February 6, 2013.

Mental Health First Aid USA website,
<http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>, last visited on February 6, 2013.

S.B. 153, “A Bill to Amend Section 520J of the Public Health Service Act to Authorize Grants for Mental Health First Aid Training Programs,”
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c113:S.153.IS:>, last visited on February 6, 2013.

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