Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States and around the world. One in four Americans will experience a diagnosable mental illness each year. However, even the most serious mental health conditions can be treated, allowing people to better contribute to their families and communities.

Through its Mental Health Program, The Carter Center works to promote awareness about mental health issues, inform public policy, achieve equity for mental health care comparable to other health care, and reduce stigma and discrimination against those with mental health and substance-use conditions, both in the United States and internationally. The Center’s work is currently focused in three areas:

- Promoting behavioral health with a focus on vulnerable populations through policy reform.
- Reducing stigma and discrimination through journalism.
- Strengthening mental health systems and integrated service delivery in Liberia and Haiti.

Promoting Behavioral Health in Communities Through Policy Reform

The Carter Center has maintained its core mission of addressing discrimination against people with mental health disorders and promoting access to care while also being responsive to relevant global and policy events. The Carter Center uses its convening power to bring together medical professionals, business leaders, consumers, and policymakers to discuss public policy issues facing mental health and substance-use care systems nationwide and at the state level. Special focus is placed on youth and older adults and how best to implement and enforce parity, or equitable insurance coverage for those with mental health and substance-use conditions.

Utilizing our unique position in Georgia, The Carter Center works to advance evidence-based public policy at the state level while identifying best practices that can inform policy change in other states and at the federal level. The Center works to ensure access to behavioral health services with a special focus on vulnerable populations in Georgia, through (1) implementation and enforcement of parity; (2) improving access to school-based behavioral health services and supports for youth; and (3) increasing access to care for older adults with mental illnesses.

Reducing Stigma and Discrimination Through Journalism Fellowships

For over two decades, the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism at The Carter Center have supported journalists across the United States and other countries with reporting on mental health issues. Fellows’ projects tackle some of society’s biggest behavioral health challenges and aim to strengthen reporting, drive change, and help reduce stigma through storytelling.

The program awards nonresidential yearlong fellowships to as many as 12 journalists from the United States and partner countries. Fellows receive intensive training and mentorship from leading mental health experts and journalists, networking opportunities, and a stipend to report on a specialized mental health topic. Founded in 1996, fellowships have been awarded to over 220 journalists from the United States, Colombia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Romania, South Africa, and New Zealand.
Strengthening Mental Health Systems and Integrated Service Delivery in Liberia and Haiti

As a result of rigorous programming over the last 10 years, The Carter Center is recognized as the leading nongovernmental organization for mental health in postconflict Liberia. The Carter Center and its partners have trained, graduated, and accredited over 340 mental health clinicians, 120 of whom specialize in child and adolescent mental health. Current activities focus on continuing to develop a sustainable behavioral health workforce, promoting national policies and legal frameworks for mental health with a human rights lens, and developing culturally competent adapted tools and resources in coordination with the Liberian government, mental health champions, and local organizations.

A key dimension of efforts in Liberia is the integration of mental health into other health priorities, such as maternal and child health and neglected tropical diseases (NTD) case management. The latter builds on the Carter Center’s burgeoning research in integrated mental health and NTD programming in Haiti and, more broadly, the Center’s global footprint in NTD eradication, elimination, and control.

Finally, the global portfolio includes efforts to integrate mental health into other development priorities, including the World Health Organization’s NTD Roadmap and the education sector. The Center works closely with global and national mental health organizations and service user groups to galvanize momentum around advocacy and anti-stigma activities.

The Carter Center and its partners have trained, graduated, and accredited over 340 mental health clinicians in Liberia.

Rosalynn Carter’s 50 Years of Mental Health Advocacy

Rosalynn Carter has been a visible, active leader in the mental health field for 50 years.

Her official involvement in mental health began as first lady of Georgia when she participated in the Governor’s Commission to Improve Services for Mentally and Emotionally Handicapped Georgians, the first statewide commission on mental health.

As U.S. first lady, Mrs. Carter co-chaired the first national commission on mental health. Under her leadership, The Carter Center has had major influence in the development and adoption of U.S. policies and laws that promote greater access to behavioral health services.

For decades, Mrs. Carter was a tireless advocate for the adoption of parity for insurance coverage for mental health and substance-use services.

The Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum, established in 1995, is held each May to address timely mental health policy issues facing the state.