

# THE CARTER CENTER



## MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

One in four Americans currently suffers from a mental illness (Kessler, 2006). Mental illnesses are among the most prevalent health conditions, yet most people do not receive treatment. Mental health is such an integral part of daily life that it should be a priority for families and communities.

For more than 30 years, former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's active leadership in the field of mental health has helped bring this topic to national prominence as a vital component of overall health and wellness. Her commitment led to the establishment of the Carter Center Mental Health Program in 1991.

### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Mental Health Program works toward two primary goals: to reduce stigma and discrimination against people with mental illnesses and to influence mental health policy in the United States and around the world. The program is known for acting as an honest broker between advocates, policymakers and consumers of mental health services to support reform and improvement in the field.



*Carter Center staff and interns spend Mental Health Day at the Georgia state Capitol.*

## Rosalynn Carter: Tireless Advocate for Mental Health Issues

Former U.S. First Lady Rosalynn Carter has worked for more than three decades to improve the quality of life for people with mental illnesses. Mrs. Carter emerged as a national driving force for mental health when, during the Carter administration, she became honorary chairwoman of the President's Commission on Mental Health, which resulted in passage of the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980.

Co-founder of The Carter Center with President Carter, Mrs. Carter chairs the Center's Mental Health Task Force, an advisory body of experts, advocates, and consumers of

mental health services that promotes positive change in the mental health field.

In addition to her many domestic mental health involvements, Mrs. Carter chairs the International Committee of Women Leaders for Mental Health, consisting of royalty, heads of state, and first ladies. This organization promotes World Mental Health Day (Oct. 10) and global mental health issues.

---

*“Despite the current health care ‘revolution,’ mental illnesses still remain shrouded in myth or mystery, perpetuating stigma and discrimination against people who have them.”*

— Former U.S. First Lady Rosalynn Carter

---



Mrs. Carter and Thom Bornemann,  
director of the Mental Health Program

Annemarie Poyo

### INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY

#### Rosalynn Carter Symposium on Mental Health Policy

The annual symposium addresses major policy challenges in the field at local, state, and national levels. All attendees participate in on-site work groups designed to generate practical solutions to the symposium subject. Past topics

have included Hurricane Katrina, the 9/11 attacks, and mental health care for children and families.

#### Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum

The annual forum focuses on issues within the state of Georgia, home of The Carter Center. Forums convene policy-makers, advocates, and consumers of

mental health services from throughout the state. Topics have included Medicaid and managed care, reducing stigma, and transforming mental health care in Georgia.

## REDUCING STIGMA

### Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism

The Mental Health Program awards stipends to 10 working journalists each year to study and report on mental health issues. The program aims to improve media portrayals of mental illnesses. Fellows hail from the United States and select countries around the world and work with mentors from the mental health field on their year-long projects.

### Global Health Consortium for the Advancement of Mental Health Promotion and the Prevention of Mental Disorders

This consortium brings together researchers, clinicians, and advocacy groups to ensure that promotion and prevention activities are included in national mental health plans and policies.

In addition, the program sponsors periodic public lectures about current issues in mental health through the annual series “Conversations at The Carter Center.” Past topics have included mental health in the workplace and the arts and treatment of mental illnesses.

## IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Most people are unaware of the scope of mental illnesses in the United States:

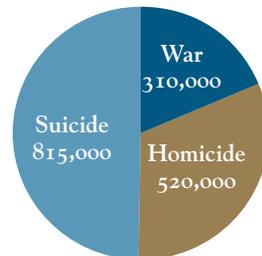
- An estimated 26 percent of Americans suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year
- 50 percent of lifelong mental illnesses begin by age 14
- 60 percent of people with mental illnesses do not receive any treatment (Kessler, 2006)

In addition, the costs of untreated mental illnesses are astounding. In the U.S. alone, depression accounts for \$44 billion a year in lost productivity (Stewart et al., 2003). And of the more than 30,000 Americans who commit suicide annually, 90 percent suffer from mental illnesses (Arias et al, 2003).

The lack of attention to mental health issues is a global issue. In 36

percent of countries, 1 percent of the national health budget is allocated to mental health, and mental illnesses are the leading cause of disability in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, twice as disabling as the second leading cause—alcohol-and drug-related disorders (World Health Organization, 2003).

### THE LEADING CAUSES OF VIOLENT DEATH PER YEAR



Source: World Health Organization (2002)

# The Carter Center

The Carter Center is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization founded in 1982 in Atlanta, Ga., by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in partnership with Emory University. The Center seeks to wage peace, fight disease, and build hope in a world where people live every day under difficult, life-threatening conditions caused by war, disease, famine, and poverty. The ultimate goal is to help create a world where every man, woman, and child has the opportunity to enjoy good health and live in peace.

## References

- Arias, E., Anderson, R., Kung, H.-C., Murphy, S., & Kochanek, K. (2003). *Deaths: Final Data for 2001*, 52 Nat'l Vital Stat. Rep. 8. Centers for Disease Control.
- Kessler, R. C. (2006). National Comorbidity Survey: Replication (NCS-R), 2000-2003 [Computer file]. Conducted by Harvard Medical School, Department of Health Care Policy; and University of Michigan, Survey Research Center. ICPSR04438-v3. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor].
- Stewart, W., Ricci, J., Chee, E., Hahn, S., Morgastein, D. (2003). Cost of lost productive work time among U.S. workers with depression. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 289, 3135-3144.
- World Health Organization. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- World Health Organization (2003). *The World Health Report 2003 — Shaping the future*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

## THE CARTER CENTER



*Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.*

THE CARTER CENTER  
One Copenhill  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30307  
Phone: 404-420-5165  
Fax: 404-420-5158  
ccmhp@emory.edu  
www.cartercenter.org