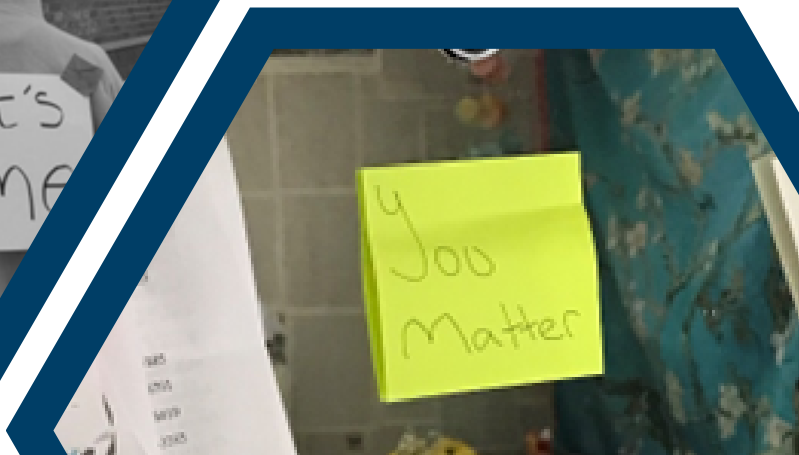


# REDUCING STIGMA AGAINST YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

A TOOLKIT FOR  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
& LEADERS ACROSS  
NORTHWEST MICHIGAN



# A CALL TO ACTION

Dear Northwest Michigan Community  
Members & Leaders,

The Behavioral Health Initiative's (BHI) Youth Task Force works to reduce the stigma that exists against youth mental health. The Youth Task Force has facilitated a number of projects that have given youth from across northwest Michigan the opportunity to voice their perspective on how stigma impacts their schools and communities, and what they feel should be done to address it.

This toolkit includes the youth-informed resources the Task Force has developed in its efforts to normalize youth mental health needs and challenges.

Please share and use the tools provided in the following pages to help individuals and communities become more informed on how stigma against mental health impacts youth and what can be done to help address this significant issue.

If you have questions about this toolkit, please email [behavioralhealth@northernmichiganchir.org](mailto:behavioralhealth@northernmichiganchir.org).

Sincerely,  
The Behavioral Health Initiative's Youth Task Force



This is the work of the Reduce Stigma Against Youth Mental Health Action Team, one of the 12 Northwest CHIR's Behavioral Health Initiative (BHI) Action Teams. Action Teams consist of cross sector partners willing and able to take action collectively and supported by the CHIR BBO staff. To learn more about the CHIR and BHI, visit [northernmichiganchir.org](http://northernmichiganchir.org)

# THROUGH OUR EYES: A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

The Youth Task Force facilitated *Through Our Eyes: A Photovoice Project on the Stigma Around Youth Mental Health*. 10 youth from across northwest Michigan participated in the project and shared their perspective on the stigma against youth mental health through photography and storytelling. Click the image or scan the QR code below to download the Photovoice guide and experience all of the images and stories that were submitted to the project.



# THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE VIDEO

Several of the Youth Task Force members and *Through Our Eyes* Photovoice project participants had the opportunity to sit on a youth-led panel and further discuss their experience with the work they have done to help raise awareness on the stigma against youth mental health. Listen as they explain their perspective on how that stigma impacts their schools and communities. Click on the image or scan the QR code below to download the video that was developed from the youth-led panel presentation and hear directly from the youth who are leading this important work.

**Reduce Stigma Against Youth Mental Health Action Team**

Brought to you with funding by:  
**MICHIGAN HEALTH ENDOWMENT FUND**  
**ROTARY CHARITIES**  
Resources for change.



## ▶ **DID YOU KNOW?**

Stigma against mental illness is one of the leading causes for why individuals who have a mental illness choose not to seek care or ask for help.

\*Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2021

# YOUTH-DRIVEN RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking the recommendations that were provided by the youth in the *Through Our Eyes* Photovoice project and the Youth Perspective video, the Youth Task Force developed their list of *The Top 10 Recommendations for Reducing the Stigma Around Youth Mental Health*. Click the image or scan the QR code below to download the full list of recommendations and find out what actions you can take to help reduce the stigma.

## ***The Top 10 Recommendations for Reducing the Stigma around Youth Mental Health***

This list of recommendations was shared by youth from across northwest Michigan who participated in [Through Our Eyes: A Photovoice Project on Stigma around Youth Mental Health](#).

1. Make sure school wellness centers, counselors, and community-based mental health supports are approachable and integrated into daily routines - consider these supports an "opt-out" as opposed to an "opt-in" approach.
2. Increase youth-focused mental health education that is inclusive and destigmatizing - validate and normalize that we ALL have mental health needs that require attention, just like with our physical health.
3. Recognize that school should be a safe place and is sometimes the ONLY safe place students have. Ensure ALL school staff are equipped to recognize and address mental health needs in students.
4. Normalize the understanding that mental health challenges are just as unique as the people they impact. Notice, without judgment, if there are changes in someone's attitude or behavior and let them know what you are seeing and that you are there to help.
5. Increase safe and supportive connections between school staff and students - Recognize that school can be a lot of pressure and normalize students' need to take breaks.
6. Prioritize yourself! - Model positive mental health behaviors like taking a break when needed and normalize that self-care isn't selfish.
7. Provide supportive and inclusive opportunities within your organization or community that allow people to come together to openly discuss mental health.
8. Establish designated spaces at school for youth to go to decompress and self-reflect when experiencing acute mental health challenges. Students need to find their "comfortable/safe" space at school, schools need to provide more of these.
9. Identify places within the community that youth typically gather and develop opportunities for youth to decompress and self-reflect in those places. Youth need more safe spaces in our communities to be able to "declutter" and self reflect.
10. Use social media as a tool for fostering open and inclusive education, communication, and connection around mental health - Normalize that often what we see on social media is not representative of someone's whole self.



This is the work of the Reduce Stigma Against Youth Mental Health Action Team, one of the 10 Northwest CHR's Behavioral Health Initiative Action Teams. Action Teams consist of cross sector partners willing and able to take action collectively and supported by the CHR BBO staff. Learn more about the [CHR](#) and the [Behavioral Health Initiative](#), and stay connected by [subscribing here](#).



# A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

To further spread awareness and fight the stigma around youth mental health, the Youth Task Force took phrases from the stories included in the *Through Our Eyes* Photovoice project and created a 30 second PSA that aired on radio stations that reach communities across northwest Michigan. Click the image or scan the QR code below to download the PSA and use youth voice in your work to help fight the stigma.



## ▶ **DID YOU KNOW?**

Introducing strategies and interventions that work to reduce stigma can increase positive attitudes around the topic of mental health and well-being.

\*Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2021

# ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES



Host the physical *Through Our Eyes* Photovoice exhibit within your organization or at your next event! Click [HERE](#) or scan the QR code to reserve the display. The exhibit includes 13 posters that can be displayed on easels.

Participate in the BHI's Reduce Stigma Against Mental Illness Action Team's campaign, which aims to reduce the stigma around mental health. Click the image to the right to access and download social media posts that you can share on your own social media platforms.

## The Northern Michigan Behavioral Health Initiative Survey found:



#StopStigma

**Believe Stigma is an Obstacle to Seeking Treatment for a Mental Illness**

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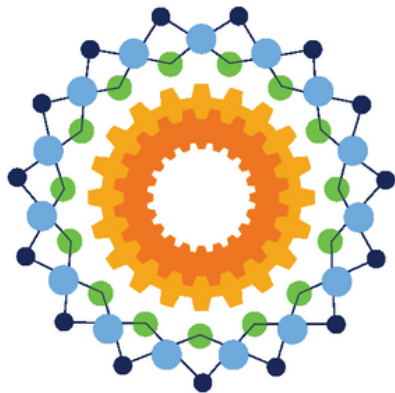


DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
District Health Department '10  
Healthy People. Healthy Communities.



Click the image to the left to visit the BHI's website and learn more about the Initiative's work and the projects that all 12 of the Action Teams are working on to increase access to behavioral health services and enhance well-being and resiliency.

# FUNDING FOR THE PROJECTS INCLUDED IN THIS TOOLKIT IS PROVIDED BY:



**ROTARY**  
**CHARITIES**  
*Resources for change.*

**MICHIGAN HEALTH**

**ENDOWMENT FUND**

**Data Reference:**

Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2021. Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Michigan Youth with School-Based Health Services [PDF].