Uniting for Mental Health in 2020 – Advocacy and Voter Registration Training
ABOUT US
Mental Health for US is a nonpartisan, educational initiative focused on elevating mental health and addiction in policy conversations around the country by empowering grassroots advocates and improving candidate and policymaker health literacy.

Launched in June 2019, our growing coalition includes 95+ nonprofit organizations from around the country, as well as numerous corporate sponsors and partners.
MEET YOUR PRESENTERS

Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP
Vice President for State and Federal Advocacy
Mental Health America

Caren Howard
Advocacy Manager
Mental Health America

Moderator: Casey Dillon, Managing Director, Mental Health for US
To gain an understanding of the role mental health and addiction currently play in national policy conversations.

To gain an understanding of the various ways you can be an advocate for mental health and addiction.

To obtain resources and tips for helping people register to vote, including holding voter registration drives.
Mental Health for US presents a comprehensive policy platform with three focus areas: prevention, access and intervention, and recovery. The policy platform was developed in coordination with our coalition leadership and is supported by all coalition members.

**PREVENTION**

Stakeholders on the local, state, and national levels must unite to foster healthy environments for all Americans that support mental health as a part of overall health.

**ACCESS AND INTERVENTION**

All people living with mental illness, including substance use disorders and eating disorders, deserve timely access to affordable treatment and recovery services that treat the mind and the body.

**RECOVERY**

Recovery from mental health and substance use disorders is not one-size-fits-all. A wide variety of recovery services, treatments, and supports should be available to those who need them.

Read the full platform at mentalhealthforus.net/platform.
WHAT IS ADVOCACY?
“We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

- Thomas Jefferson
YOUR ROLE IN GOVERNMENT

Every citizen has the right and responsibility to participate in our government! Whether it’s through voting, organizing, or being an advocate for issues you care about, we hope you participate.

Community
Grassroots
Direct
DIRECT ADVOCACY

**ADVOCACY**

Efforts that educate a group of people, such as legislators, about an issue

**LOBBYING**

Efforts that attempt to influence legislation

Source: Advocates for Opioid Recovery
Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper

Utilize social media to share your key messages

Join a group of fellow advocates to organize your community

Encourage your community to practice their constitutional right to vote and make their own voices heard!
WHY VOTING?
2020 began with predictions that voter turnout could reach its highest levels in more than a century. Given the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, experts believe we may struggle to match voter participation rates seen in 2016.

- Voter turnout during **presidential election years** average around 60%
- Voter turnout during **midterm elections** average around 40%
- Voter turnout during elections that take place in **odd years** (primaries and local elections) are even lower

**Note:** We know that people living with mental illness and addiction—as with other disenfranchised communities—participate in elections at even lower rates than these.

WHY DOES VOTING MATTER?

1. Elections help us generate community and feel connected to people who are like us.

2. Elections help us participate in civic culture.

3. Elections are a means of individual and group expression.

(Source: Vox, What good are elections, anyway?, Jennifer Victor, October 30, 2018)
TALKING ABOUT THE ELECTION

America’s election system is complex, and changes from state to state. Before you take action to educate others, take some time to brush up on your own election knowledge!

- How do I check my registration status?
- When are my statewide and local elections held?
- What’s the difference between the primaries and the general election?
- When is the deadline to register to vote?
- Does my state have a primary or a caucus? What’s the difference?
- What is an open vs. closed primary?
Each state has different guidelines for absentee or mail-in voting:

- In two-thirds of the states, any qualified voter may vote by mail without offering an excuse.
- Some states require you to have a reason for requesting a mail-in ballot, including illness, disability, childcare, caregiving for a relative, or school or work commitments.
- Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington have universal mail-voting.

Reminder: Vote.org has a state-by-state guide to the policies and procedures that govern mail-in voting in each state. Please refer to these and similar trustworthy sources when exploring remote voting options.

(Source: Vote Latino, Voting safely during the COVID-19 pandemic)
STAYING SAFE AT THE POLLS

If your state’s laws on absentee and mail-in ballots are restrictive, here’s some advice for staying safe while out voting this November:

- If you can’t vote by mail, try to **vote early**! Early voting allows you to cast your vote in person when there are fewer crowds and lines.

- Try to vote at a time of day when your precinct is **less likely to be crowded**. This is often early morning or mid-afternoon.

- Practice **social distancing** while standing in line and interacting with other voters and poll workers and make sure you wash your hands before and after voting.

- Some polling places will offer **curb-side voting**, where you can vote from your car. Call your county election administrator ahead of time to see if they offer curb-side voting.

(Source: Vote Latino, Voting safely during the COVID-19 pandemic)
STAYING SAFE AT THE POLLS, CONT.

Voto Latino has a list of states that offer early voting. Check out their website to find early voting dates in your state if mail-in voting isn’t an option.
One of the most important pieces of information to be aware of is your state’s voter registration deadlines – each state is different, and some deadlines may change from year to year.

HeadCount offers a state-by-state guide to help you keep up with election dates and voter registration deadlines in your state.
Helping people register to vote could be as easy as walking them through a paper registration or sending them the online voter registration link – either way, registering to vote is easy and only takes a few minutes.

Whether they require paper forms, mail-in registrations, or allow people to register online, each state has a different process for registering new voters.

The Fair Elections Center has a comprehensive guide for the voter registration policies and procedures in each state. Please refer to your state’s guide before engaging in voter registration activities.

Check out Vote.org for a list of voter registration deadlines around the country – this is especially important if your state doesn’t offer a robust online voter registration system.
You’ve got the information, now it’s time to get to work! Voter registration drives are a great way to connect with your community and talk with people about the importance of being an engaged citizen.

**Ideas for outreach:**
- Print out some of your state’s voter registration forms and head to a local park or grocery store to ask people if they’re registered to vote.
- Attend community events like parades or festivals and spark up conversations with people walking by.
- Spend an afternoon knocking on doors to ask your neighbors if they’ve registered to vote yet.

**GET CREATIVE** – during the COVID-19 crisis, you may have to get creative and engage with your communities while practicing social distancing:
- Host a virtual voter registration party on zoom or skype.
- Share information about registering to vote on virtual neighborhood message boards like Nextdoor.
- Team up with other community leaders to make calls to your neighbors.
Simply registering to vote isn’t enough – to truly be an engaged citizen you should take the time to learn about who and what’s on the ballot!

**VOTE411** lets you type in your address to see where candidates running for office in your community stand on the issues. You can also learn more about the initiatives that will be on your ballot come November.

**Project Vote Smart** will give you information about your representatives, including biographies, voting records, issue positions, and campaign contributions.

*Mental Health for US* asked presidential candidates where they stand on issues addressing mental illness and addiction. [Visit our website](#) to see what they had to say.
Civic engagement works best when it’s not politically motivated, but rather motivated by our interest in ensuring our communities have the tools they need to practice their constitutional right to vote!

- Nonpartisan voter engagement is legal, ethical, professional, and central to the values and mission of social work.
- Communities with high voter turnout report greater well-being, and higher amounts of resources and attention from elected officials.
- Voting gives people and communities the power to voice their opinion and effect social change.

**When We All Vote** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is on a mission to increase participation in every election and close the race and age voting gap.

(Source: UCONN School of Social Work, Voting is Social Work)
If your organization wants to make voter engagement a priority, there are tons of great resources available that can help you get started!

The National Council for Behavioral Health’s **Get Out the Vote 2020 Toolkit** will help your organization create, launch and sustain a successful voter registration and voter education program for the 2020 General Election Cycle.

Nonprofit VOTE has **guides** for 501(c)(3) organizations on non-partisan voter participation and education.

**PRO TIP** – Your organization can designate a voter engagement coordinator. This person would be responsible for coordinating your outreach strategy and training your members how to register others to vote.
Use the resources we’ve discussed today to help your organization engage in voter registration and education. Work with your designated voter engagement coordinator to hold your own training:

**HOST YOUR OWN VOTER REGISTRATION TRAINING**

Coordinate your organization’s voter outreach strategy.

Provide non-partisan voter education resources like Vote 411 and HeadCount.

Ensure each member knows how to appropriately fill out the voter registration paperwork as directed by your state’s guidelines.
THE WEVOTE PLEDGE

Changing America’s mental health and addiction care system is going to take all of us – it’s time for our community to stand up, exercise our constitutional rights, and make our voices heard!

The Mental Health for US coalition is calling on the entire mental health and addiction community to take the WEVOTE Pledge and commit to helping at least 5 friends or family members register to vote between now and November.

Text WEVOTE to 444-999
QUESTIONS?

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Caren Howard
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Mental Health America

For questions about Mental Health for US, contact Casey Dillon at casey.dillon@curastrategies.com
To learn more and get involved, visit mentalhealthforus.net/voters

THANK YOU!