



MENTAL WELLNESS CAMPAIGN
FOR ANOKA COUNTY

At a glance: 2010 community mental health survey results

The Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County is a diverse group of partners with a mission to “promote increased public awareness, understanding and acceptance of mental health care.” In 2006, they partnered with Wilder Research to survey residents about their attitudes and beliefs about mental health. In 2009, the Campaign asked Wilder to repeat the survey, to obtain more current information about residents’ attitudes and to determine whether perceptions of mental health have changed over time.

For both assessments, Wilder Research worked with Campaign members to implement a multi-faceted data collection approach. Data were collected through an advertised online survey, opportunities for residents to call Wilder to be interviewed, in-person data collection at public locations and community gatherings, and a phone survey to reach a random sample of 100 residents.

Between November 2009 and February 2010, 1,377 County residents were surveyed. Based on the population of Anoka County, this number of responses provides a confidence interval (margin of error) of three points. The respondents comprise a representative sample in terms of age, educational background, and city or town of residence. Comparable to the county population, 91 percent of the respondents were White. Sixty-three percent worked outside the home; 12 percent were retired; 11 percent were current students; 7 percent were unemployed; and 5 percent were homemakers. Gender is the only way in which the sample does not reflect the overall county; men make up 50 percent of the population, but only 27 percent of the sample.

Are residents aware of the Campaign?

- In 2010, 15 percent of the respondents were familiar with the Campaign prior to the survey.
- They were most likely to be familiar with newspaper articles, flyers or brochures, resource fairs/booths, and posters or displays.

How familiar are residents with mental illness?

- About seven in ten residents (71%) were very familiar with mental illness, saying that it had affected a relative, someone they lived with, or themselves.
- Many residents underestimated the prevalence of mental health concerns.

Have residents seen recent publicity?

- Approximately 6 in 10 respondents had seen recent publicity about mental illness issues.
- Almost two-thirds of these respondents (63%) had seen information in a television commercial; other prevalent sources of information were television news, newspapers, and magazines.

What do residents think about mental illness?

- Attitudes were generally positive, with almost all respondents “strongly agreeing” or “agreeing” that mental health is as important as physical health, mental illness can happen to anyone, and mental illness can be effectively treated. Relatively few agreed that they try to avoid people with a mental illness, feel unsafe around people with a mental illness, or would be uncomfortable if someone with a mental illness lived in their neighborhood.
- Only 36 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they would trust someone with a mental illness to take care of their loved ones, and 23 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that people with a mental illness should be excluded from public leadership.

Continued

“The 2010 survey data is important to the Campaign because we can compare the results to those from 2006 in order to see how we are trending in terms of creating awareness, understanding and acceptance of mental health issues. The survey results will help us shape our strategic plan, allowing us to target our outreach and education efforts in the community.”

Tammy Ferguson – Chairperson, Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County

- On some questions, views varied significantly based on respondent background. In general, people had more positive attitudes if they had at least a two-year college degree and if they were women, White, or more familiar with mental health.

Have attitudes changed since 2006?

- The percentage of residents who “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they would trust someone with a mental illness to take care of loved ones increased (from 29% to 36%), while the percentage who agreed that people with mental illness should be excluded from public leadership decreased (from 29% to 23%).
- There were smaller, but still significant, improvements in several other items.

Who are residents comfortable discussing mental health concerns with?

- At least 8 in 10 respondents would feel comfortable discussing their own or their child’s mental health issues with doctors and clergy members or other religious/spiritual leaders.
- Most parents (86%) would feel comfortable discussing concerns about their child with their child’s teachers and counselors.
- Informal support was also important, with most residents comfortable discussing mental health issues with family members and friends.

Where would residents go for help?

- Seven in 10 respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they knew how to find out what mental health services are available.
- They were more likely to say that they would try to solve the problem on their own, rather than seeking treatment, when it comes to their own mental health (62%) as opposed to that of their child (46%).

Do residents want to know more?

- Just over half (52%) of the residents were interested in learning more about mental health.
- Women, non-White residents, and residents age 51 or older expressed higher interest.

- Respondents’ preferred ways to receive information are the Internet, newspapers, and flyers or brochures.

Does society need to be more accepting of people with mental illness?

- Almost all respondents (95%) said that society needs to be more accepting of people with a mental illness.
- Residents suggested several key messages to increase acceptance, emphasizing that mental illness can be effectively treated, can happen to anyone, has a biological basis, and can have a wide range of symptoms and effects.

Recommendations

- Share information with residents about the prevalence of mental illness.
- Provide resources for friends and family members who may not know how to talk with or help loved ones with mental health concerns.
- Provide information about potential signs of mental health issues and positive models of recognizable individuals with mental illness.
- Share examples of individuals with mental illness who successfully carry out roles requiring trust, responsibility, or leadership.
- Use creative and proactive strategies to share information with men and engage them in conversations about mental health.
- Provide age-appropriate education and resources to younger residents, especially children.
- Provide targeted information to assist doctors, clergy, and teachers in providing accurate information, support, and local resources.
- Continue to publicize information about available mental health services and resources.
- Encourage residents to seek help right away, rather than addressing concerns on their own.
- Work with employers to distribute information about mental health and community resources.
- Partner with culturally-based organizations to provide culturally-appropriate and relevant information and resources.
- Continue to highlight key messages that resonate strongly with residents.

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451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700

www.wilderresearch.org



For more information

This fact sheet presents highlights of the 2009-10 *Community Mental Health Survey* for the Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County. For more information about this report, contact Cheryl Holm-Hansen at Wilder Research, 651-280-2708. For more information about the Mental Wellness Campaign, please call Bill Pinsonnault, 763-422-7007.

Authors: Cheryl Holm-Hansen and Laura Martell Kelly
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