



MENTAL WELLNESS CAMPAIGN

FOR ANOKA COUNTY

At a glance: 2005-06 community survey result



The Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County, a group of consumers, family members, community leaders, and human services professionals, set out to learn what Anoka County residents think about mental health. With funding from Anoka County and Connexus Energy, the Campaign hired Wilder Research to collect information between November 2005 and February 2006.

Just over 1,120 responses provide a snapshot of current perceptions of mental illness in Anoka County. This information will help guide the Campaign's educational efforts as they work to reduce the barriers to mental wellness.

Familiarity with mental health issues

The 1,123 survey participants comprise a broad, representative sample of Anoka County residents:

- About two-thirds of the residents were very familiar with mental health, with 37% having a relative with mental illness.
- Most others had only seen mental illness through the media or casual observation.
- Many residents underestimated the proportion of the population with mental health concerns. While 27% picked 1 in 5 people will experience mental health concerns and 25% picked 1 in 10, 42% thought a much lower percentage of the population (from 1 in 25 to 1 in 250) would experience mental health issues.

Attitudes and beliefs about mental health/ illness

- More than 9 out of 10 said that mental health is as important to someone's well-being as their physical health, that mental illness can happen to anyone, and that mental illness can be effectively treated.
- More than 8 out of 10 do not try to avoid people who have a mental illness, do not feel unsafe around people with a mental illness, and would not feel uncomfortable if someone with a mental illness lived in their neighborhood.

- However, fewer people (about 3 in 10) would trust someone with mental illness to take care of loved ones, and the same percentage believe they should be excluded from positions of public leadership.

Discussing mental health issues with other people

- Most people (8 or 9 out of 10) would feel comfortable talking about mental health issues with doctors, clergy, and school staff.
- Many people would also talk to family members or friends.
- Most were not comfortable discussing mental health issues with co-workers or neighbors.

Knowledge about mental health services and likelihood of using them

- About one-third of the residents do not know how to find out about mental health services for themselves.
- One-quarter do not know how to find services for their children.
- Approximately half of the people would try to solve mental health problems themselves, before seeking treatment.

Interest in learning more about mental health issues

- Just under half of the survey participants want to learn more about mental health.
- They prefer newspapers, flyers or brochures, and the Internet to receive that information.
- 61% have seen recent publicity about mental health issues, especially through television news or commercials, newspapers, and magazines.

Most important messages for increasing acceptance of people with mental illness

Most residents said that society needs to be more accepting of people with mental illnesses. They suggested highlighting the following messages:

- Mental illness can happen to anyone.
- There are different levels of mental illness, with a range of symptoms and effects.
- Mental illness has a biological basis similar to other medical conditions.

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Recommendations for reducing stigma and other barriers to mental wellness

- Familiarity with mental illness issues is a strong predictor of attitudes toward individuals with mental illness and the likelihood of seeking help. Use strategies that feature recognizable individuals, rather than providing general information.
- Provide accurate information about the approximate prevalence of mental health issues (1 out of 5 people) to increase awareness and shape attitudes.
- Promote images of individuals with mental illnesses successfully performing roles involving responsibility and leadership.
- Provide information to doctors, spiritual leaders and school personnel—those most likely to be approached by someone with mental health questions.
- Target outreach efforts to men and younger individuals and individuals from racial/ethnic backgrounds other than White. These groups report more barriers.
- Publicize available mental health services and resources.

About the Survey

In summer 2005, members of the Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County began working with Wilder Research on a research project to measure the beliefs and knowledge of Anoka County residents regarding mental health.

Wilder Research developed a survey that used both established and original survey questions. Between November 2005 and February 2006, 1,123 Anoka County residents completed the survey. Survey methods included a well-advertised online survey, in-person interviews at public locations and community gatherings, and a random telephone survey of county residents. This level of participation provides a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points.

A diverse group of Anoka County residents completed the survey, representing people of different ages, educational levels, occupations, and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Gender was the one area in which the sample did not reflect the overall county population. Half of the county residents, but only 30 percent of the survey respondents, were male. This level of participation yields a margin of error of +/- 5 percentage points for males only.

For more information

This fact sheet presents highlights of the *2005-06 Community Survey* for the Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County. For more information about this report, contact Cheryl Holm-Hansen at Wilder Research, 651-647-4624. For more information about the Mental Wellness Campaign, please call Bill Pinsonnault, 763-422-7007