

Mental health and well-being

NARRATIVES AND HEALTH EQUITY: EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

Health is more than physical well-being; the body depends on positive mental health and well-being to function at its best. The emerging narrative emphasizes that mental health comes from the interaction between biology and experience, which shape the chemicals and structures of the brains, particularly during early childhood and adolescence. Experience includes the settings where we live, learn, work, and play; fear, trauma, and chronic stress; oppression; and physical illness. The emerging narrative also points out that communities, organizations, and decision-makers all can make a positive difference in mental health for populations across the state.

1. Everyone deserves the opportunity for mental health and well-being.
2. Experience builds our brains. The interaction between our biology and our experiences shapes the chemicals and structures of our brains, particularly during early childhood and adolescence.
3. Fear, trauma, and chronic stress have negative impacts on mental health and well-being. While we all experience stress and hard times, the cumulative impacts of chronic or intense stress are real. Chronic stress gets built into our bodies and is passed on to the next generation.
4. Where we live, learn, work and play makes a difference for our mental health and well-being. Where we live, learn, work and play includes structures and environments that are safe, nurturing, inviting, and toxin free, and that facilitate positive relationships, community and culture.
5. Resilience is not enough in the face of oppression. Experiences of oppression are bad for our mental health and well-being. Intentional systemic changes to end oppression are essential to help individuals, families and communities thrive.
6. Deep, interwoven connections exist between physical health and mental health and well-being. When we experience physical illness, injury or pain it has a negative impact on our mental health and well-being. Improving physical health improves mental health and well-being.
7. Mental health and well-being happens in and through community. Everyone and every system has a role and responsibility to assure the collective mental health and well-being of the whole community.
 - a. We all benefit when public and private organizations work together.
 - b. We can spread and protect mental health and well-being by building positive relationships, social connections and drawing on community and cultural assets.
8. Mental health and well-being requires a sense of purpose and power. A true experience of mental health and well-being requires knowing that we have the power to shape our world and change our lives and conditions for the better. For many, structural barriers and historical trauma continue to take away a sense of purpose and power and are a daily part of life experience.

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9. Positive relationships are central to mental health and well-being. Positive relationships provide meaning and facilitate skill development and feelings of belonging. Without positive relationships we become isolated and suffer negative physical and mental health. Positive relationships are not automatic; families and communities need information, resources, and other supports to help cultivate and sustain them.
10. Culture shapes our definitions and understanding of mental health and well-being. It is okay and healthy for individuals and communities to have different perspectives on what it means to be well and how to achieve well-being. Culture is a source of healing, connection and strength.
11. Everyone needs the opportunity to learn and practice skills to manage life and engage in the world. Skills to manage stress, to find balance and focus, and to engage socially are critical components that should be cultivated throughout the lifespan in both formal and informal settings. Skills and experiences that help people feel valuable and engage in their family, community and economy are also critical.

For narrative frames on other topics, visit:

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