

## Mental Health First Aid: *Research and Evidence Overview*

Mental Health First Aid is an international program with proven effectiveness. Five published studies in Australia show that the program saves lives, improves the mental health of the individual administering care *and* the one receiving it, expands knowledge of mental illnesses and their treatments, increases the services provided and reduces overall stigma by improving mental health “literacy”. Mental health literacy is defined as empowering the public to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness. Studies also found the program reduces overall stigma of mental health and even improves the mental health of program participants. A list of relevant international studies can be found at <https://www.mhfa.com.au/cms/evaluation-publications/>.

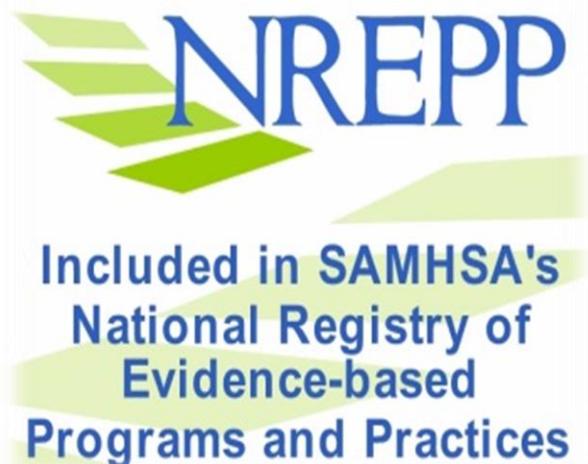
### BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE IN THE US

Mental Health First Aid is now listed in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP). NREPP is a searchable database of mental health and substance abuse interventions to help the public find programs and practices that may best meet their needs and learn how to implement them in their communities. All interventions in the registry have been independently assessed and rated for quality of research and readiness for dissemination. The summary for MHFA can be viewed at <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=321>.

### OUTCOME STUDIES: NATIONAL EFFORTS

**Fidelity Study:** SAMHSA provided a grant to the University of Maryland to conduct a review of the adaptation process of the MHFA USA program in regards to its fidelity to the original Australian program. Outcomes of the study are not directly related to feedback from course participants. Final report produced. *Summary of findings:* MHFA USA developed in fidelity to the original Australian program and includes adequate certification standards and procedures to ensure fidelity continues to be upheld.

**Higher Education Study:** National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) supported Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) and the University of Michigan to conduct a 2-year study of MHFA at 32 institutions nationwide resulting in a final report. The study found that resident assistants who took the MHFA training showed increased positive affect, perceived knowledge of mental illnesses (relative to the average person), positive beliefs about treatment, confidence in assisting someone with a mental health problem and use of therapy/counseling.



**Course Evaluation Analysis:** The University of New Mexico is currently conducting an evaluation of course participant feedback. The emphasis of this analysis is on differences in response in rural versus urban course settings, as well as differences in response to the program across demographics.

**Local/Regional Efforts:** A number of states and cities across the country have begun to evaluate the progress of MHFA in their communities:

- *Alaska:* In 2012, Nearly 200 Mental Health First Aiders participated in a coordinated pre/post-test for all course participants throughout the state.
- *Chicago:* Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4) received grant from the State of Illinois to evaluate their MHFA program. The focus of the evaluation was two-fold: a process evaluation used to increase fidelity among their 10 instructors, as well as conducting pre/post testing to measure the impact of the program.
- *Colorado:* Supported by a SAMHSA Challenge grant, the Colorado Behavioral Health Council, in coordinated with instructors from across the state in order to conduct pre/posttests with all MHFA training participants.
- *Philadelphia:* Drexel University is working in conjunction with the City of Philadelphia to evaluate the MHFA program across the city. Philadelphia is looking at a population based approach to the program, with the goal of getting 10% of the city trained. The focus of the evaluation will be on Public Safety and Faith based audiences, assessing the impact of MHFA in the work, community and personal lives of public safety and faith-based Mental Health First Aiders with a focus on several key impact measures tied to the ALGEE mnemonic.
- *Kansas:* University of Kansas conducting is currently conducting interviews in order to analyze the implementation of the MHFA program across the state of Kansas. The primary focus of the analysis is on how the program has been utilized and in which sectors.