

Impact of Mental Health Awareness Training

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What is Mental Health First Aid?

In 2018, Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) expanded its training and educational opportunities by offering **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**. MHFA is an evidence-based national certification managed by the National Council for Behavioral Health designed to train members of the community in skills to assist when someone faces a mental health or substance use crisis or challenge. Trainees learn risk factors, warning signs, and a 5-step action plan on how to guide someone to helpful resources.

CHA's geographic catchment area (GCA) includes some of the lowest income communities in Massachusetts as well as the most culturally diverse.



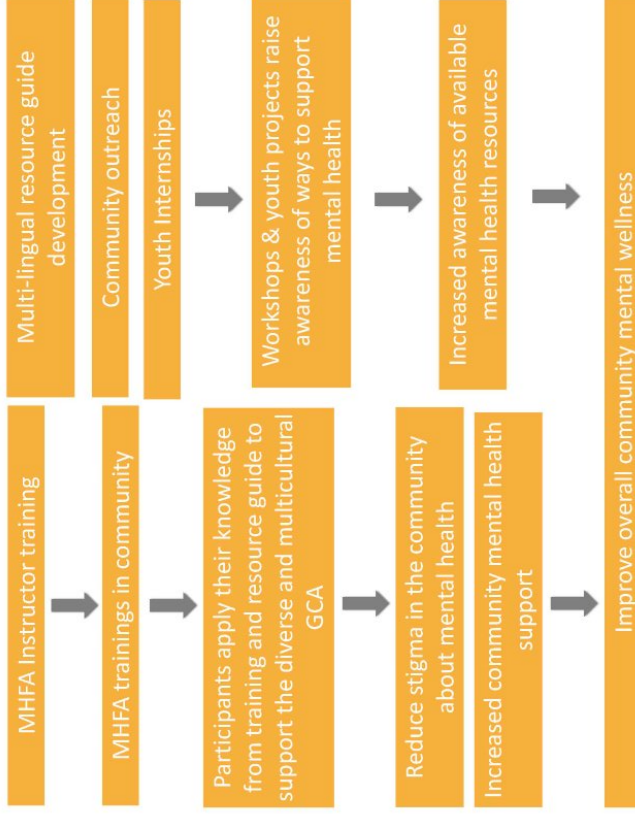
Cambridge Health Alliance geographic catchment area (GCA)

Who Does CHA Train?

- CHA patients, employees, & volunteers
- Public safety personnel & community health workers
- Youth-serving agencies, housing advocates, & substance abuse counselors
- Community members

900+ community members from more than 8 cities have been trained in Mental Health First Aid through this initiative.

Program Model



Through continued MHFA training and outreach, CHA hopes to improve the mental health for all 450,000+ community members living in the high-needs and underserved GCA.

"The training has had a big impact on my ability to identify, advocate for, and support others, while being empathetic to their experiences and needs."
- **MHFA Participant**

Evaluation Methods

- **Post-training** and quarterly **follow-up surveys**
- **Focus groups** with past participants
- Tracking training participant demographics

Training Impact

Participants noted that MHFA provided them with the confidence to initiate mental health discussions and the resources to competently help their patients/clients, family, and friends.

- **1226** individuals referred to resources from 2019 through 2020
- **3 in 5** participants used material from the training to assist someone in need of support
- **93%** could reach out to someone experiencing a mental health challenge
- **96%** recognized the signs that someone may be experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis
- **19** Youth Mental Health & Wellness interns hosted to date

COVID-19 Adaptations

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health awareness and services. With the increase in community mental health needs, CHA has adapted and continued to meet project goals through:

- New virtual MHFA trainings and virtual summer internships for youth
- Digitally accessible MHFA Resource Guides
- COVID-focused mental health workshops