**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.

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**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.

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**Program Model**

- MHFA Instructor training
- MHFA trainings in community
- Participants apply their knowledge from training and resource guide to support the diverse and multicultural GCA
- Reduce stigma in the community about mental health
- Increased community mental health support
- Improve overall community mental wellness
- Multi-lingual resource guide development
- Community outreach
- Youth Internships
- Workshops & youth projects raise awareness of ways to support mental health
- Increased awareness of available mental health resources

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**Evaluation Methods**

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

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**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

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**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

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“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