

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Advocates to Gather at Statehouse to Support Mental Health, Suicide Prevention Awareness**

Columbia, SC – On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, advocates from across the state will gather at the south side steps of the South Carolina State House for Mental Health Advocacy Day 2024.

Coordinated by the South Carolina Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP-SC), the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of South Carolina, Mental Health America (MHA) of South Carolina, and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH). The event is designed to raise awareness among elected officials about mental health and suicide prevention. Advocates will meet with elected officials about the importance of prioritizing mental health and suicide prevention policy.

This event will include a resource fair featuring information from local organizations and state agencies. Remarks will begin at 10:00am, which will include personal stories and testimonials from state legislators and community champions.

“Suicide is a leading cause of death in the U.S. and the 12th leading cause of death in South Carolina, and good mental health is vital for all,” said Jessica Barnes, program manager of SCDMH’s Office of Suicide Prevention. “Advocacy day is important because it allows patients, family members, professionals, and other citizens who care about these issues celebrate South Carolina’s accomplishments in these areas and raise awareness of our needs with those who represent us.”

“This event is important to me and many others in South Carolina because it’s a rare opportunity to share personal stories and the latest research directly with lawmakers who shape our state’s investments in mental health and suicide prevention,” said AFSP-SC Area Director John Tjaarda. “AFSP advocates are passionate about policy priorities including S.408, S.864, S. 865, and H.4365 and many are eager to share their connection to the cause.”

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AFSP's mission is to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP-SC provides education through the community-based program Talk Saves Lives and More Than Sad, a suicide-prevention training for educators. Their support for suicide loss survivors includes a peer support program, Healing Conversations, and multiple Out of the Darkness Walks across the state.

NAMI provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives. NAMI offers support groups for those living with mental illness, NAMI Connect, as well as support groups for their families.

MHA advances the mental health and well-being of all people living in the U.S. through public education, research, advocacy and public policy, and direct service. MHA-SC provides the community with trainings such as Mental Health First Aid and the I.C. Hope Don't Duck Mental Health program that serves to dispel the negative images associated with mental illness for grades K-12. They also manage Bridges Clubhouses, a mental health day treatment program for adults diagnosed with mental illness.

The SCDMH's mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses. The Department provides clinical services to approximately 100,000 patients each year, about 30,000 of whom are children. As South Carolina's public mental health system, SCDMH provides outpatient mental health care through a network of 16 community mental health centers and associated clinics serving all 46 counties and inpatient psychiatric treatment in three state hospitals.

AFSP-SC, MHA of SC, NAMI-SC, and the SCDMH all work together to provide support and services to South Carolinians recovering from mental illness and those affected by suicide. Together they provide education and trainings across the state, offer peer support programs, and share resources to the community.

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