

# PRESS RELEASE



ERIE COUNTY  
**ANTI-STIGMA**  
COALITION

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 30, 2017

Join the conversation

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## “JOIN THE CONVERSATION” MENTAL HEALTH ANTI-STIGMA CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES TUESDAY, MAY 30 AT 10AM

**Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Creates a Community Conversation Platform  
to Stop Stigma Surrounding Mental Health**

(BUFFALO, NY – 5/30/2017) - - The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition officially launched today “Join the Conversation,” a public awareness campaign to address the stigma surrounding mental illness. The campaign is designed to start a community conversation to educate the public on the real facts surrounding mental illness and give those who suffer a voice in an effort to reduce or eliminate stigma in Erie County.

Fifteen well-known community organizations came together in the fall of 2015 to form the coalition. “We came together in the pursuit of one common goal,” says coalition chair, Max Donatelli, “to change how people in our community view mental illness in order to reduce or eliminate stigma in Erie County and Western New York.”

Mental illness is a disease. As with any disease, prevention, early intervention and treatment save lives. Stigma is a known barrier to seeking and receiving treatment. The coalition believes normalizing the conversation around mental health issues is the first step in helping those who suffer get help and leads to creating a healthier community for all.

According to Michael Ranney, CRC-R, LMHC, Erie County Commissioner of Mental Health and coalition member, “Approximately 1 in 5 Western New Yorkers are living with a mental health condition. Yet many of these people suffer in silence because of the discrimination that goes along with it. By starting a community conversation where people can share their stories, their struggles and their successes, we’re hoping to reduce stigma. Through this effort, we hope that people dealing with mental health challenges will know they are not alone, help is available and recovery is possible.”

Research shows that stigma prevents people from seeking help. It restricts resources from being allocated and it discourages others from lending their support. One of the best ways to stop the stigma is to learn more about mental illness. Separating the truth from the stigma can help increase awareness, understanding and acceptance for those who live with a mental health challenge.

The cornerstone of the campaign is the website [www.letstalkstigma.org](http://www.letstalkstigma.org) and its social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter where individuals can find facts, information, other people’s stories and experiences, available resources and, of course, a place to join the conversation.

The campaign is being funded by The Patrick P. Lee Foundation, The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, Erie County Department of Mental Health and the donations and in-kind services of the coalition's founding partners.

**Coalition Founding Partners:**

- BryLin Behavioral Health System
- Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
- Community Partners of Western New York
- Compeer
- Crisis Services of Erie County
- Erie County Department of Mental Health
- Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
- Fellows Action Network
- Fuerst Consulting Corporation
- Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
- Mental Health Association of Erie County
- Millennium Collaborative Care
- Preventionfocus, Inc.
- Telesco Creative Group
- The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

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**About Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition**

The Anti-Stigma Coalition is composed of members from 15 well known organizations who came together in the pursuit of one common goal: to change how people in our community view mental illness in order to reduce or eliminate stigma in Erie County and Western New York.