MY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

A Guide for Individuals With Behavioral Health Disorders & Their Families & Caregivers

WHY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IS SO IMPORTANT

Although anyone confronted with a natural or human-made disaster will find him- or herself stressed and panicked, for the 5.7 million Marylanders with mental health issues (according to Mental Health America) such an event can lead to a serious emotional breakdown that can leave them vulnerable in an emergency.

The National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) defines "putting your life on hold to combat an emergency" as a "catastrophic stressor." Catastrophic stressors by their nature are

- **unexpected**
- **dangerous to yourself or others**
- **unlike any earlier experience you might have had**

Such an event, says NAMI, is especially difficult for those with behavioral health issues and disabilities who respond with an increase in symptoms. In fact, the National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH) has conducted research that has found that in a crisis, individuals who already have or who have had behavioral health issues in the past are more likely to develop more intense symptoms in a crisis. These symptoms can become so intense that it becomes difficult for the individual to think through how to react to the emergency in a logical way. Therefore, preparation is so critical.

HOW TO PREPARE

Make sure you have prepared a Psychiatric Advance Directive (PAD)—a legal document that allows a second party to act on your behalf should you become unable to make decisions about your treatment.

Gather the following items:

- ☐ Documentation of any history of drug abuse
- ☐ Documentation of any triggers for suicide, psychotic episodes, etc.
- ☐ List of medications currently being taken, including any special instructions, such as time of day they are to be taken and interactions with other medications
- ☐ List of allergies to specific medications
- ☐ Prescriptions for your medications
- ☐ Medications in bottle clearly labeled, with the prescriber's name on the label and instructions for taking the medication
- ☐ Names and contact information of providers and associated diagnoses
- ☐ Insurance information and insurance card
- ☐ A print-out of the above list

  In an emergency, the need for a waiver of privacy to obtain medical records is not necessary, but you may want to include one with your paperwork anyway.

IF AN EMERGENCY DOES OCCUR

- Make sure you are not injured. In a catastrophe or an emergency event, people often do not realize they have been hurt until well after the fact.

- Complete one task at a time.

- Call 911 or the Disaster Distress Helpline at **800-985-5990.** (See Resources Below.)

- Contact a friend or family member.

- Make sure you know where your identification is.

RESOURCES

NAMI

To reach a trained crisis counselor who will provide immediate services, **call 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.**

NAMI also staffs a crisis text line. **Text NAMI to 741-741** to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Disaster Technical Assistance Center

To reach a trained crisis counselor who will provide immediate services, call 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.

• SAMHSA's Disaster Technical Assistance Center supports SAMHSA's efforts to deliver an effective nationwide behavioral health response to disaster. Its services include a mobile app that is targeted toward providers. The Center trains first responders how to recognize and respond to symptoms of PTSD, depression, or severe emotional reactions.

In addition, both NAMI and SAMHSA host the **Disaster Distress HelpLine.**

• Staffed by trained counselors 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, the services of the helpline include providing counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to a natural or human caused disaster. Put this number and text information on your refrigerator or in your phone: **800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.**

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