

**Report from Stigma Plank  
National Summit of Mental Health Consumers and Survivors  
Portland, Oregon  
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**Introduction:**

The participants in the stigma plank had no debate over the fact that stigma exists and the damaging effects it has on individuals who have been diagnosed with mental illness. Panelists from the University of Chicago shared information that raised awareness about the fact that internalized stigma, stigma that one holds against oneself once diagnosed, is just as damaging as external stigma, the way the world looks upon and judges those diagnosed as a group.

Participants were eager to identify ways in which to address both internal and external stigma. Numerous action steps were identified, and were categorized as addressing either internal or external stigma. It is important to note that there was not overall agreement on all of these methods. Additionally, some ways were identified as courses that could be taken to implement the action steps. Finally, the group came to consensus on ten action steps that are recommended initially to move forward in the fight against stigma.

**Stigma Plank Goals**

1. Create unified voice.
2. Assure awareness of stigma resources.
3. Identify actions to take to attack stigma.
4. Assure realistic portrayal and positive image of mental health consumers/survivors.
5. Gain media attention.
6. Know when to respond to stigmatizing events.
7. Fight laws being created based on stigmatizing situations.

**Ten Action Steps**

1. Encourage honest and open self-disclosure.
2. Develop alliances with other disability/disenfranchised groups who deal with stigma.
3. Educate the public by using the media in ways that others can relate to.
4. Develop task forces at all levels — regional, state, national — to address stigma.
5. Conduct outreach and education to other target groups.\*
6. Develop strategies to counter the violence myth.
7. Hold forums to re-conceptualize potentially stigmatizing terminology/language, such as “mental illness.”
8. Identify, duplicate and share information on successful programs that fight stigma.

9. Create national editorial board to seek exposure and respond to stigmatizing issues and incidents.
10. Educate the criminal justice system \*

\* To be effective, any educational initiative must focus on demonstrating that people who are diagnosed with mental illness are people first, with talents, skills and abilities; it should not focus on the biochemical/medical nature of the illness.

Action areas (the following indicates where or how action can take place to effect change):

Media: M

Education: E

Public Relations: P

Legal/Legislative: L

Self-action: S

### **Internal Stigma**

- Identify, duplicate and share information on successful programs that fight stigma: E,F
- Being out of the closet: S
- Work to overcome the fear of being labeled so that treatment will be sought: S
- Identify and acknowledge what can be done for myself: S
- Establish target dates for goal implementation: M
- Form self-help forums to change our own attitudes: E,S
- Educate ourselves on stigma so that people will take us seriously: E
- Be honest with self and others in interpersonal relationships: S
- Recognize stigma as a part of the human condition and learn not to take it personally: S

### **External Stigma**

- Consumer/survivor movement (not voted on)
- Educate police: E,L
- Develop alliances with like movements: E,P,M
- Work on action ideas
- Work on hate crime legislation: P,L,E,M
- Who are “the mentally ill” (identity issue): All
- Develop a how-to book: E,P
- Develop a press kit: P,M,E
- Develop ongoing workshops on stigma: E,P,S
- Publicize average success stories: P,M,S,E
- Educate using media in a way that others can relate to: M,E
- Develop task forces at all levels (regional, local, and national): All
- Counter the violence connection/perception:
- Find a way to show that you can’t identify persons who have mental illness by looking at them: P,E,M
- Develop strategies to counter the violence myth: M,P,E

- Create a national editorial board to seek exposure on the issue of stigma: M,P,E
- Media response readiness (experts to counter negative events: respond, not react): M,P,E
- Counter negative, illness-focused campaigns: P,E,M
- Identify a positive well-known spokesperson, public relations campaign: P,M,E,L
- Educate the criminal justice system: E,L,P

### **Both Internal and External Stigma**

- Utilize Americans with Disabilities Act: L,E
- Illness of any kind and seeking help does not make you a “bad” person: P
- Share personal experiences: S,P,L,M,E
- Mental illness is not a moral defect: M,E,P,S
- Learn from other groups who have combated stigma: E,S
- Share information on a one-to-one basis: E, S
- Humor as a tool to de-stigmatize: S,P
- Hold forums to re-conceptualize language such as “mental illness”: E,P,S,M
- Outreach and education of/to older people, people of color, multicultural
- Identify and evaluate programs in existence that deal with stigma-“busting”: E
- Counter neurological/biological theory: S,E,M,P
- Educate as to connection between child abuse and emotional disability: E,S,P,M
- Move from mental illness/mental health perspective to emotional disability/ability: E