

# Elevating Perinatal and Postpartum Support: Perinatal Mental Health First Aid

*The MAP Forward: Raising the Bar for Maternal Health Equity*

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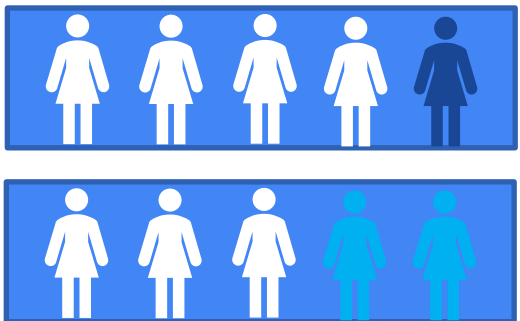




## Maternal Mental Health

In New Jersey, **mental health conditions** are a **leading cause of maternal deaths**.

- 60% of maternal deaths occurred for reasons unrelated to the pregnancy (i.e., pregnancy related reasons such as hemorrhage or preeclampsia)
  - Over 70% were due to mental health related conditions
  - **Almost all** (95%) of these deaths were deemed **preventable**.



**1 in 5** women, and **3 in 5** women of color, will experience mental health symptoms during or after pregnancy



**75%** go untreated

## Impact of Untreated Maternal Mental Health

### On Mothers

Women with untreated MMH conditions during pregnancy are more likely to:<sup>26, 27</sup>

- Have poor prenatal care.
- Use substances such as alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.
- Experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Women with untreated MMH conditions postpartum are more likely to:<sup>28</sup>

- Be less responsive to their baby's cues.
- Have fewer positive interactions with their baby.
- Experience breastfeeding challenges.
- Question their competences as mothers.

### On Children

Infants born to mothers with untreated MMH conditions are at higher risk for:

- Preterm birth, small for gestational size, low birth weight.<sup>27, 29</sup>
- Stillbirth.<sup>27</sup>
- Longer stay in the neonatal intensive care unit.<sup>30</sup>
- Excessive crying.<sup>31</sup>

Untreated MMH conditions in the parent can increase the risk for:

- Impaired parent-child interactions.<sup>31</sup>
- Behavioral, cognitive, emotional delays in the child.<sup>32</sup>
- Adverse childhood experiences.<sup>33</sup>

### On Parents

Parents who are depressed or anxious are more likely to:<sup>34, 35</sup>

- Make more trips to the emergency department or doctor's office.
- Find it challenging to manage their child's chronic health conditions.
- Not adhere to guidance for safe infant sleep and car seat usage.



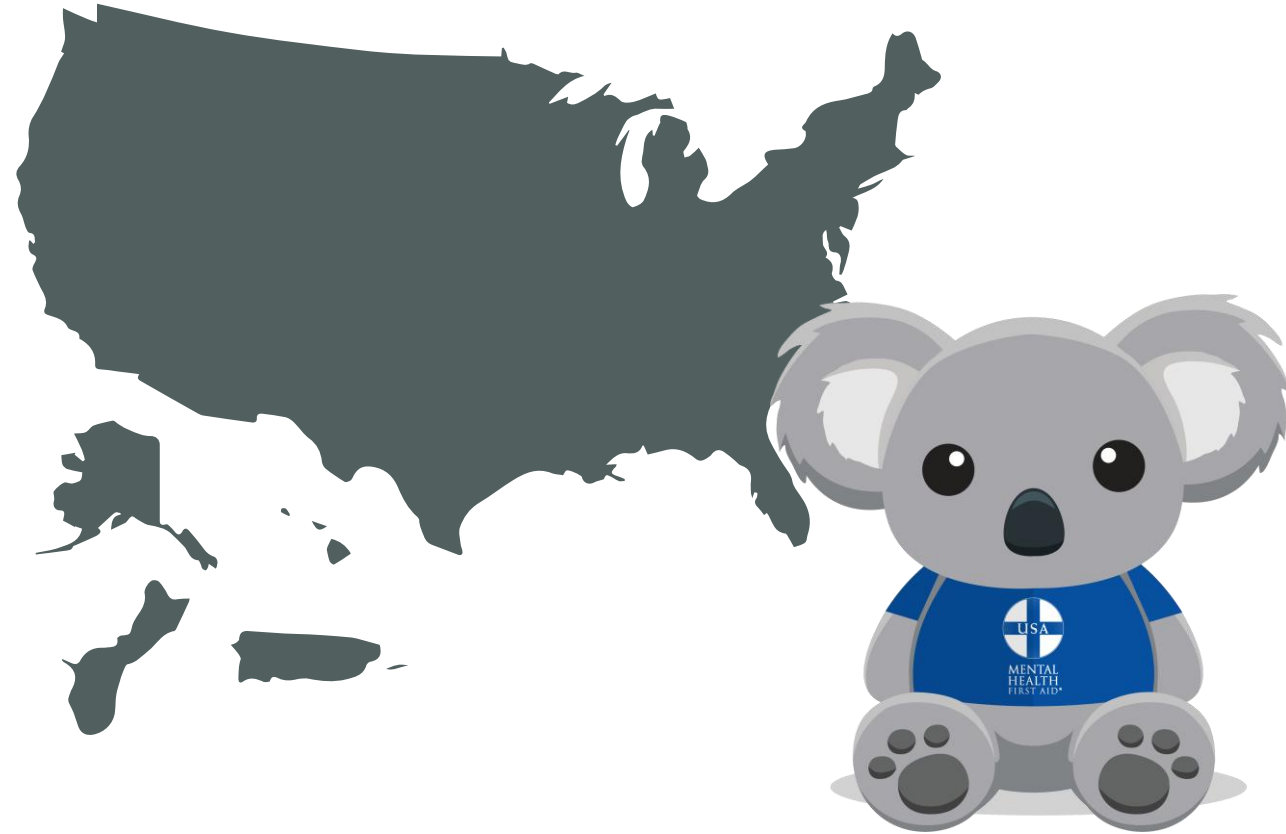
# What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid is an evidenced-based public education course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health challenges and substance use disorders.

The training provides the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use challenges or experiencing a crisis.

# What is Mental Health First Aid?

Currently there are more than 4 million Mental Health First Aiders in the United States and territories. MHFA is offered in all 50 states and over 29 countries around the world.



Certification is nationally recognized and is valid for 3 years

Mental Health First Aid  
is Offered Through the  
National Council for  
Mental Wellbeing

It Covers:

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Common signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges

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How to notice early and worsening signs and symptoms and how to interact support.

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How to support a person in crisis.

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Appropriate resources available locally, statewide and nationally.

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A strong emphasis on resilience and recovery.

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A strong focus on self-care for providers.

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# THE EVIDENCE



## **INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY**

Grow their knowledge of signs, symptoms, and risk factors of mental illness and addictions.



## **INCREASED CONFIDENCE**

Increase their confidence and likelihood to help an individual in distress.



## **INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES**

Can identify multiple types of professional and self-help resources for individuals with a mental health challenge.



## **PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS**

Show decreased psychological distress and increased mental wellness themselves.

# What is the Vision for Mental Health First Aid in the US?

- MHFA wants everyone in America to have at least one First Aider in their close circle.
- Every 1 in 15 people should be certified to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges.

**#BeThe1in15**



# What are the Benefits of MHFA

- ❑ Many of us know how to show support around medical issues, but too few of us know how to respond if we saw someone having a panic attack or if we were concerned that someone close to us might be showing early signs of a mental health challenge.
- ❑ MHFA takes the fear and hesitation out of starting these conversations by teaching strategies on noticing and reaching out.
- ❑ MHFA gives us an action plan that is fluid and flexible to support our friends, family, and community.
- ❑ MHFA provides the opportunity to practice — through role plays, scenarios, and activities — makes it easier to apply these skills in a real-life situation.

## Key Takeaways

- ❖ Mental Health First Aid is not a replacement for professional help. It is a tool to help us to notice support and connect.
- ❖ Encouraging early intervention can aid in recovery and support families.

**We can all work towards having compassionate and empathetic conversations around mental health.**

# Thank You!

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# Quality Institute's Perinatal Mental Health First Aid Initiative

- Through the Quality Institute's *Maternity Action Plan* and partnership with community partners, greater attention has centered around the need to build the maternity workforce with education and training, so that they can better serve pregnant people.
- Although there is not a specific curriculum for the perinatal community, the Quality Institute, in partnership with the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, brought together experts, direct providers of care, and individuals with lived experience to develop 9 maternity scenarios for use in the training.
- The scenarios were approved by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, the creators of MHFA, and have been made available for nationwide use by all instructors.



**Mental Health**  
**FIRST AID**

# Quality Institute's Maternity Scenarios: Prenatal & Postpartum Stage

- Each scenario provides a storyline of a pregnant or postpartum person experiencing early, worsening, and crisis mental health signs and symptoms.
- The scenarios are also modifiable, allowing training instructors to customize details about the storyline to their preference (person's role, setting, signs and symptoms, etc.)
- Scenarios are used for participants to identify the mental health signs and symptoms and describe the course of action they would take to intervene.



 Mental Health **FIRST AID**  
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# Perinatal Mental Health First Aid: Training Outcomes

- To date, we have trained 200+ perinatal workers, including doulas, nursing staff, midwives, community health workers, family success centers staff, Healthy Start program staff, and more.
- The impact of MHFA trainings:
  - 94% reported an increased understanding of mental health and stigma
  - 95% reported an increased awareness of support strategies to assist someone in crisis/non-crisis situations and resources to address mental health
  - 100% felt confident applying the MHFA action plan to assist someone experiencing symptoms
- Data is collected 3-6 months after trainings to understand the application of learned skills:
  - 90% reported using the training skills in their interactions with pregnant people to identify and support mental health symptoms
  - 98% reported feeling confident with applying the Mental Health ALGE action plan steps to provide initial support to someone experiencing mental health symptoms.



# Perinatal Mental Health First Aid Training: Qualitative Data

- Participants have reported feeling better equipped, prepared, and confident with providing mental health support to pregnant people, colleagues, family members, and friends.

"I was helping a mother who was going through a pretty dark time after giving birth. I was able to follow the ALGEE steps and get help. It was the most rewarding feeling I have ever had helping someone."

"The training has definitely helped me to become more confident in my awareness of mental health challenges and in my ability to support others with compassion."

"I incorporate the ALGEE steps in my everyday life now. My patient was experiencing preterm labor symptoms, and she was very distressed after talking with the doctors. I allowed her to verbalize her feelings and then incorporated a plan with her, and she agreed to talk with a clinician about her feelings. She stayed in the hospital for six weeks and had a successful pregnancy outcome."

# Perinatal Mental Health First Aid:

## Personal Story from *Kesmeel Davis*



## PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

*Personal Stories From Training Participants*

### KESMEEL'S STORY

Kesmeel Davis, Postpartum Doula

#### **Why did you take Mental Health First Aid?**

"A lot of parents are not aware of how pregnancy can affect, or heighten existing, mental health changes in the postpartum period. There is a need for education for them, and for me.

As a doula, you receive education on anxiety and mood disorders. But you are not trained in how to approach it, how to talk to parents, or the resources. Mental Health First Aid allowed me to learn and identify mental health challenges in a nonjudgmental way."

#### **How has Mental Health First Aid helped you support birthing people?**

"The training helped me realize a different approach, a better, more empathetic one, to help someone with mental health challenges. I had a client with a history of mental health challenges and was in therapy. She was having trouble breastfeeding. Before the training, I would have encouraged her to keep breastfeeding and gave advice. After the training, I knew my role was not to diagnose but to listen first. Listening nonjudgmentally is so critical. She didn't need professional resources. She needed someone to listen to. She decided to end breastfeeding. It was impacting her mental health and I understood how it was affecting her because I listened. I assessed how I could support her in that choice and offered reassurance and information. To have learned how to help someone feel safe enough to share that and know how to support them, that was powerful. I appreciated I could hold that space with her."

