National Minority
Mental Health Awareness Month

Tips for Sharing Your Story

The following steps have been modified from NAMI's Smarts advocacy training to help you craft your story in a succinct and powerful way to be featured throughout National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month.

Each step includes examples that will give you an idea of how to craft your story. The goal is to share your story in a way that showcases your personal interpretation of the month's meaning and importance. So feel free to put things in your own words, change the statements and the order of information provided to make it your own.

> Once you have created your story, share it with others! Utilize it in your plans to build awareness this month. Consider emailing a copy to macenter@nami.org to be potentially nationally highlighted through NAMI media outlets. You can also share your story at www.nami.org/notalone.Find examples of others' personal testimonies for National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month here.

1. Introduce yourself

- **Share your full name and city or town.** This helps your audience connect with you.

  I'm (name) and I'm from (county or city).

- **Share the cultural perspective with which you identify.** If your story involves a culturally-relevant experience, this is particularly helpful to identify as part of your introduction. Complete the following sentence or write your own:

  As a member of the (African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latina/Latino, member of the GLBT, etc.) community, I am sharing my story to highlight the meaning/ importance of National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month.

- **Let your audience know how you are affected by mental illness.** This gives a "real face" to the intersections of culture, mental illness and recovery and prepares your audience to empathize with your story. Complete the following sentence or write your own:

  I live with (or am a parent of a child or have a relative/friend with or work with people who live with) mental illness.

2. What happened: What happened before you go the help you needed? Complete one of the following sentences or write your own, focusing on a particular event/ experience.

a. *Before my (own child's, partner's, parent's, client's, etc.) recovery, I/we went through some (challenging, difficult, dark) times. I/we … (experienced hospitalization, didn't have a place to live, was in jail, felt belittled and misunderstood, was excluded, could not find a provider from my same cultural background, felt disrespected/ stereotyped/ discriminated by my provider, had a very hard time accessing treatment in my language of preference, etc.)*

b. *Before I/we got the help I/we needed, I/we... (see above for examples)*

3. **What helped?** Include a sentence or two about someone or something that helped specifically address your/ a loved one's recovery needs. Complete one of the following sentences or write your own.

   a. *The/My (program name or therapist, doctor, ACT team, case manager, peer support specialist, etc.--name one or two) has/have made a big difference in my life.*

   b. *The support I get/got from (name of program or professional/staff) has helped me manage my (main diagnosis or "mental health condition").*

   c. *By being able to include all the aspects of who I am, particularly my culture, in my recovery, I am able to manage my (main diagnosis or "mental health condition").*

4. **How are you different today?** Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery. Complete one of the following sentences or write your own.

   a. *Today, I am… (for example, a peer support specialist; working part time; living on my own; doing much better; hopeful, staying out of jail/hospital, sharing my perspective to help others, etc.).*

   b. *Today, I'm proud of the fact that … (for example, I'm living in a group home and not the state hospital; starting to work; doing well; feeling like my life has meaning; I am telling my story; my daughter is experiencing recovery; there's greater awareness and acceptance of mental illness in my community, etc.)*

5. **Make your point:** This is a transition from your personal story to a message for your audience. Give a brief, positive message about inclusive and culturally competent mental health practices and their role in recovery. Feature the importance of public awareness campaigns, outreach to diverse populations, etc. Use one of the following sentences or write your own.

   a. *Mental health services/supports that are responsive to the needs of (American Indian/ Alaska Native, Hispanic, GLBT, African American, Asian American, etc.) communities are an investment in recovery. I'm living proof.*

   b. *Mental illness is common in every community and, when culturally competent services are available, recovery is possible in every community.*

   c. *Many people in my community have mental illnesses like mine, but not all get the help they need. With culturally competent mental health services, more people could experience recovery.*

6. **Make your "ask"** Let your audience know the action or position you would like them to take to help support National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. Use one of the following sentences or write your own.

   a. *Take part in mental health awareness campaigns among diverse communities and spread the message of the hope of recovery and available support to all who need it.*

   b. *Please join me in promoting the inclusion of all diverse communities in our mission of support and recovery.*

   c. *Join me during National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month and speak up about mental illness and the need for care.*

   You could also focus your "ask" on advocating for an inclusive, culturally and linguistically competent mental health system in general such as:

   e. *You can help us eliminate disparities in mental health care by supporting standardized statewide race and ethnicity data collection and public posting of meaningful performance, process and outcome measures.*

   f. *Please join me in supporting equal access to quality mental health care by promoting access to language-appropriate services.*

g. *Please help me address the dire lack of bicultural/bilingual mental health professionals by supporting multicultural workforce development efforts.*

h. *Everyone should receive culturally appropriate treatment. Please support incorporating cultural and linguistic competence standards in requirements for mental health funding.*

7. Closing Statement

Your closing is completely optional. For example, you could suggest a resource for further reading, promote a National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month activities in your area (be sure to provide further contact information for getting involved), etc.

A practice sheet in Word format is available in the tools section of www.nami.org/minoritymentalhealthmonth to help form your personal story based on these seven steps.