



Mental Illness Awareness Week, 1989

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The 20th century has been marked by major advances in medical research and technology. Today, we can easily prevent or cure many diseases that once proved to be debilitating or even deadly. Because this remarkable scientific progress has included the study of mental illness, scientists and health care professionals now have a much greater understanding of such afflictions as depression, schizophrenia, phobias, and anxiety disorders.

During the past 10 years alone, our knowledge of mental illness has increased dramatically. Indeed, our ever-expanding knowledge of the brain might well be considered one of the most profound accomplishments of our time. That is why continued failure to diagnose or treat mental illness—and to accept and understand those who suffer from it—is so needless and so regrettable. Far too many mentally ill Americans are also victims of fear, prejudice, and distrust. Mental illness not only inhibits their ability to function normally in society, but also inflicts untold personal anguish upon them and their loved ones.

Frequently the result of biological or chemical disorders in the brain, mental illness can affect anyone—regardless of age, gender, race, or economic status. For a child or adolescent, a mental illness left untreated can mean years of torment, as well as lost opportunities to learn and grow. Adults who suffer from mental illness may not only lose their independence and ability to contribute, but also become strangers to their families and friends. Elderly victims can enjoy neither the comforts of retirement nor the well-earned respect and dignity rightfully afforded to our senior citizens. Tragically, the confusion, alienation, and loss of hope felt by some victims of mental illness—young and old alike—have even led them to take their own lives.

We can—and we must—help the victims of mental illness. Of the millions of Americans who suffer from depression, well over half could benefit from proper treatment. Scientific research has produced treatments that can alleviate the hallucinations and delusions that haunt victims of schizophrenia. There are also treatments, including medications and various forms of psychotherapy, to allay crippling panic and anxiety disorders and to help patients overcome dysfunctional behavior patterns. Today, improved methods of diagnosis and care can offer hope and healing to millions of people with mental disorders.

This week, we salute the dedicated scientists, health care professionals, and volunteers who are working hard to help solve the mysteries of mental illness and alleviate the suffering of its victims. In academic institutions, hospitals, and community-based mental health programs across the country, they are helping to destroy the myths and fears that prevent too many victims of mental illness from obtaining the help and compassion they need. All of us can assist their efforts by learning more about mental illness and by supporting continued research and effective treatment programs. Most important, however, we can help victims of mental illness and their families by giving them our encouragement and understanding.

In recognition of the importance of informing the public about mental illness and the needs of those who suffer from it, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 55, has designated the week beginning October 1, 1989, as "Mental Illness Awareness Week" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week of October 1 through October 7, 1989, as Mental Illness Awareness Week. I call upon all citizens of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities designed to promote greater understanding of mental illness and its victims' need for effective treatment and rehabilitation.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fourteenth.

George Bush