



Mental Health

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.

And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- Take five minutes to review the [Executive Summary](#) for this brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- According to [2020 data](#) from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 52.9 million U.S. adults (21%) experience mental illness each year, but less than half receive treatment.
- The federal government has over [40 programs](#) serving people with mental illness. The [2022 SAMHSA budget allocates](#) over \$5.5 billion for these programs. NIMH spending on mental health provides an additional \$5 billion in research.
- Some economic forecasts estimate "that the cost of treating widespread anxiety and depression will create a [\\$1.6 trillion drag](#) on the U.S. economy" due to lost productivity and medical expenses.

Let's discuss

Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** What challenges and factors should individual communities consider when addressing mental health? How does mental illness most impact our community? What are local groups doing to address this?
- **Government:** What should government priorities be when it comes to addressing mental health? What does this look like at the federal, state, and local levels?
- **Business:** What is your experience with mental health policies at your place of work?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify the status of mental issues in your community. Identify a group of peers from your neighborhood, school, or office and host a conversation. If someone is in crisis or needs access to care, visit [NAMI's site](#).
2. **Explore the impact of mental health care laws in your community.** Search for [your state's laws](#) relating to mental health care. See how much your state receives in [SAMHSA grants](#).
3. **Gain Better Understanding of Access and Coverage.** Visit [APA Guide](#) and the [Parity Tracker](#) to learn more.
4. **Investigate community programs in your state or municipality.** What [state associations](#) or [local organizations](#) exist?
5. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on policies relating to mental health, and their vision for how to tackle mental health care challenges facing Americans and your community. [Here are tips](#) about what to ask and how to learn more about candidates and elected official's positions on mental health. Find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
6. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
7. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on policies related to mental health in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [Healthcare](#)
 - [Health Disparities](#)
 - [The Opioid Epidemic](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.