Federal Ad Campaign Fights Stigma of Mental Illness Among Blacks

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has launched a new ad campaign—in partnership with the Ad Council and the Stay Strong Foundation—to raise awareness and reduce stigma about mental illness among young adults in the African-American community.

SAMHSA reports that while the prevalence of serious mental illness is highest among 18- to 25-year-olds, only 59 percent of Americans with a mental illness receive treatment. Among blacks, only 45 percent receive treatment.

“Raising understanding and attention to these issues within the African-American community will provide greater opportunities for those needing help to receive effective mental health services,” said Kathryn A. Power, director of SAMHSA’s Center for Mental Health Services.

Terrie M. Williams, MSW, the cofounder of the Stay Strong Foundation, has spent the last several years focusing on how depression affects the African-American community. The Stay Strong Foundation was formed to support, educate and inspire young African Americans.

“Every day so many of us wear the ‘mask’ of wellness that hides our pain from the world,” Williams said. “Now is the time to identify and name our pain—minus the myths and the stigmas—and seek the help so many of us need.”

SAMHSA is also working with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities’ (HBCU) Center for Excellence in Substance Abuse and Mental Health at Morehouse Medical School to improve behavioral health on HBCU campuses.

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