

# MHALA

Mental Health America of Los Angeles

## PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY PLATFORM



## MHALA ADVOCACY THEN AND NOW

Mental Health America of Los Angeles (MHALA) was born out of the advocacy of “mental health consumers” (i.e., people who access mental health services, who we refer to as “members” today). There have been several waves of advocacy by those who were diagnosed with and treated for mental illnesses, often in inhumane conditions. MHALA has a long history of advocating for mental health resources, access, and equity.

MHALA has transformed how mental health is understood and addressed in California and across the United States through our innovative model of member support, training, and advocacy for laws, including California’s Mental Health Services Act. We continue to evolve in our approach and our advocacy evolves alongside it.

We believe that mental health, like our overall health, is something that everyone has and that we all have the potential to face mental health challenges. Like physical health, inequities in our society make mental health challenges more dire for groups who are already marginalized. As such, our policy priorities reflect the many factors impacting one’s wellbeing and resilience, including the social factors of physical and mental health such as our living conditions and neighborhoods, economic stability, access to resources, and social status. We believe that public policy created the inequities that we see in society today and that public policy is critical to improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities moving forward.

We arrived at our policy and advocacy priorities through numerous conversations, meetings, and surveys of MHALA members and staff.

# PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY INITIATIVES



## EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES, ACCESS, & EQUITY

MHALA supports policies that strengthen our mental health systems' ability to meet the needs of all people and communities. From prevention to supporting people with serious mental health challenges, we work to ensure resources for mental health supports at all levels. We advocate for culturally relevant mental health resources and resources that are targeted to the needs of specific populations, including youth, Veterans, older adults, LGBTQIA+ people, and immigrants. We recognize that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) with mental health challenges have faced misdiagnosis, a lower standard of care, and incarceration at higher rates than their white counterparts and seek to ameliorate these inequities through changing policies and systems.

## **ENSURE SYSTEMS & SERVICES WORK FOR VETERANS**

In addition to providing tailored support to Veterans, MHALA advocates for systems and services that meet the specific needs of Veterans. Ensuring that Veterans are fully informed of available benefits and improving access to their benefits and care are imperative to Veterans' health and stability. Additionally, reforming military discharge classifications and the process of applying for a discharge upgrade is critical to eliminating barriers to health, housing, and other benefits due to mental health conditions (including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and traumatic brain injury), military sexual trauma (sexual assault and harassment), sexual orientation, and other forms of trauma and discrimination.

## **BUILD RESILIENCE THROUGH PREVENTION & EARLY INTERVENTION**

MHALA supports the resilience of people and communities by promoting policies that emphasize prevention and early intervention. By ensuring adequate mental health education and resources for families with young children, school-aged children, and transition-age youth, we can prevent and reduce the impacts of trauma and reduce mental health crises leading to dropping out of school, incarceration, homelessness, and suicide. Additionally, we advocate for funding and programming that supports all people in establishing and maintaining meaningful roles in their communities, including supported employment, education, peer support, community building, and civic engagement. Recognizing that the sooner this happens in one's life, the more fortified people are against trauma and mental health crises, MHALA has a particular focus on youth.

## **SUPPORT YOUTH ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSION & JUSTICE**

MHALA follows the lead of youth who are advocating for robust mental health education and supports in their schools. This includes restorative practices that foster belonging and inclusion amongst students, as well as supportive relationships between young people and the adults in their schools. We are aligned with the advocacy of youth to ensure schools promote equity, are culturally relevant, and build systems of support outside of law enforcement. We also advocate for youth outside of the school system, including those who have dropped out or been pushed out of school. MHALA advocates for the health and wellness services, education and employment, and safe and stable housing young people need as a foundation on which to grow, as well as reforms to these systems to ensure that they meet the needs of youth.



## **STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SAFETY NET & ECONOMIC-INCLUSION POLICIES**

Recognizing that poverty and income inequality impact the mental health of people and communities, MHALA promotes policies aimed at reducing income inequality and strengthening interventions that lessen the adverse impacts of poverty and living in an unequal society. We support economic policies that promote the fair distribution of income; social policies that reduce gender, racial, and other inequalities; and expanding access to quality healthcare, equitable education, and living-wage jobs.

## **GROW OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYMENT**

Employment is one important avenue for people to bring more meaning, personal connections, and financial stability into their lives. MHALA advocates for supported employment services to assist people with mental health challenges and other barriers to employment in developing skills and preparing for employment, obtaining education, finding jobs, and having adequate support and resources to do well in their work. Many of the current public assistance programs rigidly disincentivize work and savings. We support robust public assistance that allows individuals to work and move out of poverty and toward financial stability.

## **SHIFT DISCRIMINATION & CRIMINALIZATION TO CARE & COMMUNITY**

MHALA affirms the dignity of all people and advocates for policies that promote racial justice and immigrant rights. We acknowledge that experiencing racism and discrimination has a negative impact on one's mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, we believe that public safety has been too narrowly defined to mean policing, incarceration and detention, fines, and other forms of punishment and social exclusion. We push for a more expansive view of public safety and join movements for criminal justice reform in advocating for significant investments in behavioral health responses for individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance use disorders, homelessness, and other situations caused by having basic needs unmet.

## **INCREASE STABILITY & SAFETY THROUGH HOUSING**

Access to safe, stable, and supportive housing is critical to one's mental health and wellbeing. Housing insecurity is an issue that impacts the vast majority of our members, regardless of their current life circumstances. Young people coming out of the foster care system, the low-income individuals we work with, and college students alike are faced with homelessness or the threat of homelessness due to a lack of affordable housing and renter protections, as well as intermediate supports such as shelters, that don't meet their needs. MHALA promotes policies to improve the quality, stability, and accessibility of housing through housing production, affordability, and renter protections. We advocate for increased funding and services for people who are facing housing insecurity and homelessness, for supportive housing, and for the protection of the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

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Connect with MHALA

