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**The Framingham Health Department Introduces Mental Health First Aid to the Metrowest Region**  
*Framingham Joins National Initiative to Increase Mental Health Literacy*

The Framingham Health Department is initiating the Mental Health First Aid program in Framingham and the Metrowest Region. In their first year, the Framingham Health Department will train at least 80 local first responders, employees and volunteers or regional non-profits, and twenty community members of the public to improve mental health literacy – helping them identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness.

“We are thrilled to bring Mental Health First Aid to our community,” said Marissa Garofano, Chief of Community Health, at the Framingham Health Department. “This important educational effort goes a lot further than emergency intervention; it really helps people understand the shroud of fear and misjudgment facing individuals and families who experience mental illnesses and addiction. It will help rid this community of the associated stigma and move more and more people toward recovery.”

Mental Health First Aid is a 8-hour training certification course which teaches participants a five-step action plan to assess a situation, select and implement interventions and secure appropriate care for the individual, the certification program introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews common treatments. Thorough evaluations in randomized controlled trials and a quantitative study have proved the CPR-like program effective in improving trainees’ knowledge of mental disorders, reducing stigma and increasing the amount of help provided to others.

“We welcome the Framingham Health Department’s involvement and enthusiasm in the Mental Health First Aid community,” says Linda Rosenberg, MSW, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health, the organization who brought Mental Health First Aid to the United States in 2008. “We know they will have a great impact on the mental health communities throughout Framingham and the MetroWest Region, and will be key players in improving mental health literacy nationwide.”

In its pilot year, the program was introduced in nearly twenty states and more than 40 communities nationwide. The National Council certified the Framingham Health Department to provide the Mental Health First Aid program in September 2015 through an instructor certification course in Madison, Wisconsin. The Framingham Health Department and all the sites across the nation that replicate this program maintain strict fidelity to the original, proven program.

Mental Health First Aid originated in 2001 in Australia under the direction of founders Betty Kitchener and Tony Jorm. To date, it has been replicated in twenty other countries worldwide, including Hong Kong, Scotland, England, Canada, Finland, and Singapore.

For more information or to participate in a Mental Health First Aid training in Framingham, or the Metrowest Region visit [framinghamma.gov](http://framinghamma.gov) or call the Framingham Health Department / Marissa Garofano at 508-532-5470.

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*The National Council for Behavioral Health is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) association of 2,000+ behavioral healthcare organizations that provide treatment and rehabilitation for mental illnesses and addictions disorders to nearly seven million adults, children and families in communities across the country. The National Council and its members bear testimony to the fact that medical, social, psychological and rehabilitation services offered in community settings help people with mental illnesses and addiction disorders recover and lead productive lives.*

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