



Getting Started with Mental Health First Aid

A Toolkit for Pharmacy Trainers

Getting Started with Mental Health First Aid

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Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a training opportunity to better position pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and student pharmacists to serve the mental health needs in their communities.

Originally designed in Australia, this 8-hour course teaches you a five-step action plan to help someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Similar to traditional physical First Aid and CPR, Mental Health First Aid is intended to provide help to someone experiencing a mental health problem or crisis until professional treatment is obtained or the crisis resolves.

The training helps you to (1) assess a situation, (2) offer initial help and support, and (3) connect someone to appropriate care if they are

experiencing a mental health or substance use problem. With a focus on learning risk factors, warning signs, and resources for mental illness and substance use disorders, attendees will be provided with the skills to display calmness, a non-judgmental attitude, empathy, and support techniques to be reassuring and encouraging.

This toolkit was developed to assist colleges of pharmacy, pharmacy associations, and other pharmacy stakeholders to organize and conduct MHFA training initiatives for their colleagues.

This toolkit complements resources that are available by the National Council for Behavioral Health and will guide you through the process of conducting MHFA trainings near you.



Becoming a **Trainer**

First-time trainers are required to apply for, and complete, a 5-day train the trainer program. The application is multifaceted and requires the applicant to detail their interest and commitment to mental health. There are sections to record professional and personal experience with various topics covered in the training, your teaching and presentation experiences, and your skills associated with leading and facilitating groups.

At the time of this project, the fee for the training was \$2000 plus travel expenses. There are two versions of the MHFA curriculum, adult and youth.

In general, the adult curriculum has the widest applicability. Although trainers looking to train pharmacists working with younger populations may consider the youth course.

The 5-day training is structured such that the instructor trainee first becomes certified in MHFA with a thorough review of the course curriculum. Instructor trainees are also taught pearls and tips on how to apply and tailor the training to diverse audiences with a range of learning styles. Then, over the next 2 half days, each trainee teaches an assigned portion of the 8-hour MHFA course and



receives feedback from the instructor trainer and peer instructor candidates. There are additional assignments and quizzes that must be completed before you graduate and become certified as an MHFA instructor who is able to conduct a MHFA training sessions on their own.

Once you become certified in one of the two MHFA courses, you can add the other train the trainer course by attending an abbreviated 3-day training. The National Council for Behavioral Health (NCBH) provides MHFA instructors access to additional resources like a suggested timeline to guide you

in conducting your first training after the train the trainer program, guides for marketing MHFA, guides for cultural considerations, and other helpful materials. Find a train the trainer session: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/find-upcoming-instructor-training-courses/>

MHFA instructors must complete a minimum of three (3) training courses per year to maintain instructor status.

Collaboration with Local Resources

One emphasis of the instructor training is to help participants understand and be aware of their local resources for appropriate professional help that can be shared with audiences they will be teaching.

As an example, the Iowa Pharmacy Association (IPA) collaborated with the Iowa Behavioral Health Association (IBHA) to develop a resource chart to understand the various clinics and associated services of IBHA members. Also with non-suicidal self-harm being discussed during the training, IPA collected various resources from the Iowa Poison Control Center for attendees. This included: magnets, flyers, and credit card holders for the back of a smartphone.

Other resources to make available:

- Opioid use disorder posters usually can be obtained through your state public health department. In Iowa, YourLifelowa.org resources included posters, social media ads, and other giveaways (some fees apply).
- National Suicide Prevention Life Line materials are available for order through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) online store at: <https://store.samhsa.gov>. Items include: posters, wallet cards, and magnets. Many items are free of charge.



Venue Identification

There was great synergy when MHFA training sessions are aligned with other relevant programs. When IPA first started conducting MHFA training sessions, the programming was aligned with local evening CE events that IPA annually conducts with local pharmacy associations. As IPA worked to identify locations for the 8-hour MHFA training, we collaborated with our members at the local level to identify the best location conducive for the training. In many cases, the MHFA training events were conducted in the same venue as the CE events. While this made for a long day, it offered convenience.

It is recommended that MHFA training sessions are capped at 30 people, with 25 being ideal.

It is suggested to partner with local hospitals, libraries, or community centers to host the training. The ideal location has moveable tables and chairs to facilitate group discussions. Round tables are ideal so groups of 4 or 5 can easily engage with each other. Long tables or rows of seats can make discussions challenging since this layout tends toward 1 on 1 discussions.

The space also needs the appropriate audio and visual (A/V) equipment to show slides and videos throughout the training. Many venues can provide this equipment for a nominal fee, but it is suggested to have your own laptop, projector, and even portable speaker.

Participant Recruitment

Targeted marketing of pharmacy professionals with an interest in mental health or substance use disorder is ideal. IPA marketed to pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians that lived or worked in or around the county where the training was occurring, pulling this information from the association membership database. In addition, local pharmacy associations promoted the training to their members as not all local association members are members of the state pharmacy association.

As IPA conducted additional training sessions, we opened the training to non-pharmacy members of the local community as well. The marketing for these sessions relied on the MHFA website, where anyone can search for an upcoming MHFA training program. There may be opportunities to partner with other stakeholders to help market the program, so rely on your network and connections to help get the word out.





Participant **Registration**

IPA used their existing website to allow interested participants to register for each MHFA course offering. This allowed IPA to collect a registration fee and log participant contact information. While grant funding may defray some of the cost of putting on the program, a nominal fee can help to ensure attendees are accountable for showing up to the day-long training.

With some grant funding in the first year, IPA set the registration fee at \$25 per person. This fee was collected to cover the cost of the required participant manual. These manuals are used as a guide for participants throughout the training and serve as a complement to the PowerPoint slides used by the trainer. As a MHFA instructor, you are provided access to sample budgets from the NCBH to assist as you set a fee structure for each planned event. Leading up to the event, it's important to monitor registration numbers to ensure at least six attendees would attend, which is the minimum number for an effective MHFA training.

Additional marketing can be pushed out if registration numbers are low. An event should be canceled or postponed if the required 6 participants are not reached.

At 3-4 days prior to the event, it is helpful to send a reminder email to registrants with details on the event location, parking, and other important messages leading up to the event.

As mentioned previously, while it is possible to create a MHFA class through the MHFA website open to the general community, the trainer also can engage in their own recruitment process to target a pharmacy-specific audience. The trainer can then submit participant names and contact information to MHFA after the training has occurred so training certificates can be conferred.

Sponsorship

MHFA targets multiple areas of mental health, many of which have available medication treatments. Sponsors may be interested in mental health in general, substance use disorder (alcoholism, opioids), suicide prevention, or other community needs. In Iowa, IPA received sponsorship for some of the events by partnering with different

pharmaceutical manufacturers that market medications for mental health conditions. IPA allowed the manufacturer to offer lunch and make a presentation during the 1-hour break built into the full day MHFA training.



Continuing **Education**

With support from the Community Pharmacy Foundation, the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) worked with the National Council for Behavioral Health to develop pharmacy-specific cases to use when training pharmacy professionals. These cases provide relatable scenarios to a community pharmacist (e.g., rotation students, robberies, working with challenging patients). With that in mind, you may need to adjust the cases if your pharmacy audience practices in non-community settings. In addition, NCPA has accredited the 8-hour adult course as CPE for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. The CPE credit

is available free of charge through NCPA.

To ensure a training session is appropriately accredited, please contact:

Hannah Fish (hannah.fish@ncpanet.org) or
Tom Kalista (tom.kalista@ncpanet.org).

It is recommended to contact NCPA at least 30 days before the scheduled training.

Upon completion of the MHFA training, pharmacists or pharmacy technicians will be provided instructions on how to obtain their CPE credit through NCPA's website (www.ncpalearn.org).

Pearls from Pharmacist-Instructors

- **Ice-Breaker**

Your ice-breaker and get-to-know-you process is important! It creates a comfortable setting for people to learn and discuss uncomfortable topics. During the train the trainer program, gather ideas from your trainers and others to help give you new ideas for ice-breaker activities.

- **Space**

Sometimes rooms may be large for the 25 or fewer participants in a MHFA training session. It can be useful to section off the room, or only use a specific number of tables and chairs. If participants initially spread themselves out, you can combine tables.

- The goal is to create a **comfortable atmosphere** for participants to work together, share experiences, ask questions, and engage in personal discussions. This stems from you as the facilitator. However, if you plan to share a personal story about mental health, be sure you have permission to share that story.

- **Privacy** is important, experiences should avoid identifying information and only the lesson from the story should leave with the other participants.

- It's important to know if you have **non-pharmacy professionals** in the training as you promote various pharmacy-related ideas (using the pharmacy cases, terminology, etc.) throughout the training.

- **Pharmacist recovery**

The MHFA techniques likely are consistent with approaches to get pharmacy professionals help with substance use disorders. Therefore, it is important to understand the details and logistics of your state's recovery program for impaired pharmacists and other pharmacy professionals (e.g., PRN programs).

- **Participant Discomfort**

MHFA can be difficult, especially for participants with prior experience with suicide. Participants may approach you at breaks or excuse themselves. The train the trainer program will give you skills for working with participants that experience an emotional reaction to the training. Delivering the training with 2 instructors can help in these situations.

- **Resources for Patients**

Participants are encouraged to have the national crisis line in their personal phones and displayed and easily accessible in the pharmacy. You also may recommend participants be knowledgeable about any company policies related to suicide or self-injury.

- There are pharmacy-based cases through NCPA that can be used when training pharmacists and pharmacy staff. These cases were developed in conjunction with the National Council for Behavioral Health. These can be useful for discussion and many of the pharmacy professionals that have been trained have shared appreciation for being trained by a fellow pharmacist.
- Be aware that MHFA training programs are occurring all over the country at any given time. While a pharmacy-specific training led by a pharmacist has extreme value, anyone can and should attend a training session whenever available. Always be aware of other training events in your area and try to even connect with these trainers. They are great resources for you to learn from as you bring these programs to a local level.



Additional **Resources**

- This webinar supported by NCPA can be used to promote MHFA to a pharmacy audience
<http://www.ncpa.co/media/video/2019/clark-bishop-mental-health-first-aid.mp4>
- NCBH also has resources on Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) naloxone, and other resources related to substance abuse.
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/mat/>
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/topics/business-case-care/>
- If and when you become a MHFA trainer, you get access to additional resources like guides for marketing MHFA, guides for cultural considerations, and other helpful materials and guides.

Thank you for your interest in MHFA!

Together we can work toward a critical mass of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians with the attitudes and skills to help persons experiencing mental health crises. You can be the difference.

