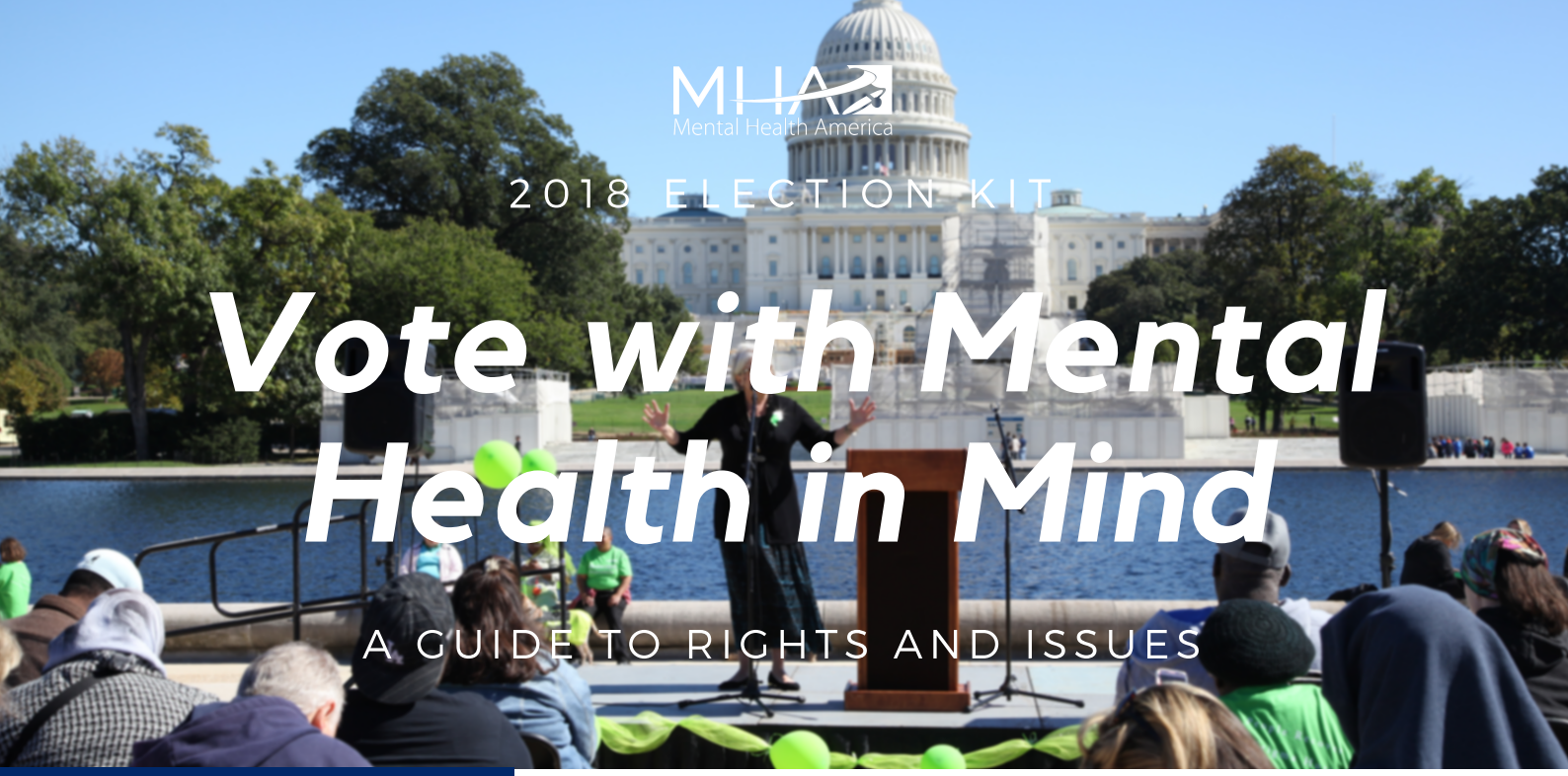

Mental Health America

2018 ELECTION KIT

Vote with Mental Health in Mind

A GUIDE TO RIGHTS AND ISSUES

This guide provides:

- Voter Registration Information
- A November Elections Action Checklist
- Questions for Town Hall & Candidate Forums
- A Review of National Party Platforms
- Relevant Websites & Additional Resources
- And Much More!

Vote with Mental Health in Mind

Changes in health care and voting laws are happening at the state and federal levels, making it more important than ever for the mental health community to be involved in this year's election.

Mental Health America (MHA) prepared this voter guide to help mental health advocates ensure that people effected by mental health and substance use conditions feel empowered and able to vote; that candidates at the federal, state, and local levels are hearing the concerns of the mental health community; and that all voters are encouraged to Vote with Mental Health in Mind.

VOTE18

VOTE WITH MENTAL HEALTH IN MIND

Know Your Rights

Voting Registration Information

Over the years, more and more troublesome restrictions have been placed on the voting process, including barriers to registration and voter identification requirements. The Brennan Center for Justice warns that this growing use of state voting laws, redrawn districts, and ID requirements can seriously impact the 2018 electoral map. Knowing your voting rights will help make sure you can vote in November.

More than 1 in 5 Americans experience some type of mental health condition, and it is crucial that all members of every community understand that individuals with mental health and substance use conditions and other disabilities have the right to vote and have the right to assistance in voting. The National Disability Rights Network provides information for voters with disabilities here.

Individuals affected by mental health conditions need to be aware of changes in voting laws that may make it significantly harder for many eligible voters to register or vote in the upcoming election. The Brennan Center's report Voting Laws Roundup 2018 outlines the various ways states have used either expansive or restrictive voting legislation to impact the ability for citizens to vote.

With recent legislation and courts striking down restrictive laws, it is essential that ALL OF US are keenly aware of recent changes in voting laws throughout the states.

For the latest updates on YOUR state voting laws, visit The Fair Elections Network, an organization that works to remove barriers to voting and improve election administration across the United States.

Deadlines to register before the general election vary state to state, but deadlines in some states are as early as October 8th. For specific information on registering to vote, re-registering, and registration deadlines in YOUR state, visit:

- The League of Women Voters
- Project Vote Smart
- Rock the Vote
- Or call 1-866-OUR-VOTE

Action Checklist

It is vitally important that the mental health and addiction recovery communities make their voices heard during the upcoming elections. Use this checklist to ensure you are taking advantage of November's local, state and federal elections to vote for America's mental health.

- [ ] **Register to vote**
  If you are already registered, do more! Get five other people to register to vote.

- [ ] **Learn about the candidates and issues**
  Visit the candidates' websites or other websites to read about their views.

- [ ] **Stay informed**
  Sign up to receive future breaking news and action alerts from MHA on important mental health issues.

- [ ] **Email the candidates**
  Most candidates allow you to email them. You can let those running for elected office know that you hold the key to their understanding issues that matter to the people they will represent, and to their political futures. They want and need to hear from you on issues you consider important.

- [ ] **Ask questions at candidate forums and town hall meetings**
  Check your local paper and your candidates' websites for scheduled events. This is a great way to make candidates go "on the record" with important mental health issues.

- [ ] **Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE) to respond to written articles about mental health or call talk radio shows**
  Use the power of mass media! *Letters To The Editor* is the most commonly read section of the paper. If you have an opinion about an article regarding a candidate, let your voice be heard by penning an LTE. If there is a call-in tv, radio show, or podcast, that is another great way to help get your message to thousands of listeners.

- [ ] **Talk with your friends and neighbors**
  Have a healthy dialogue with your friends and neighbors about why mental health is vital to every candidate's health care platform. Social networking sites can empower you to share with your friends the importance of supporting the behavioral health community when casting their vote.

I voted! Now what?

EMPOWER OTHERS TO VOTE!

Work with other community stakeholders to empower individuals affected by mental health conditions to exercise their right to vote.

Many individuals affected by mental health conditions may be reluctant to vote because they either believe they are not allowed to do so or because they are simply afraid of registering.

Helping just one person understand that they can vote is a worthwhile endeavor.

Questions for Candidates

Forums and Town Hall Meetings

The simple act of asking a question at a town hall meeting is a great way to make candidates go "on the record" with important mental health and addiction issues. Here are some mental health facts and suggested candidate questions. Check your local paper or candidates' websites for scheduled candidate forums and town hall meetings. The August Congressional recess continues through Labor Day weekend and much of October is dedicated to preparing for the election. Look for events during those times, as Congressional members will be in their home districts and their states campaigning.

The Topic	The Problem with Mental Health
Workforce and Access	Many communities face a shortage of mental health providers. Because of this workforce shortage, many people cannot access the supports and services that they need. Other supports, like peer services and telehealth programs are also not widely available.
	"How do you plan to ensure that people can actually get the mental health services that are supposed to be covered by their health plans?"
Families	Families struggle to find the best ways to support their children with emotional and behavioral challenges. They have to cobble together what they can from what is available, but might not be what they need and they receive very little support to find what's best.
	"How will you make sure our families have access to the evidence-based programs they need to best help their children with emotional and behavioral challenges?"
Children's Issues	Only a small percentage of children who need services in schools actually get them. Often, children receive school-based services only after things get very bad and even when they do, these services are not coordinated with services they receive outside of school.
	"How will you ensure that children in schools actually get the coordinated mental health services and supports they need to be college or career ready?"
Fair Coverage	Even after the passage of the federal Mental Health and Addictions Parity and Equity Act in 2008, there is still uncertainty about what exactly is expected. There is very little federal/state oversight and enforcement of the parity law, but clear evidence of violations has been reported.
	"How will you make sure health insurers, regulators, and individuals are all best equipped to understand their roles in making mental health and substance use parity a reality?"

Continued on the next page.

More Questions for Candidates

Forums and Town Hall Meetings

The Topic	The Problem with Mental Health
Insurance Coverage	Skimpy insurance plans that provide little or no mental health, substance use treatment benefits, and that do not cover prescription medications, and that exclude pre-existing conditions, are becoming more widely available.
	"What will you do see that people are not fooled into buying insurance plans that may look like a bargain, but that may not cover what is most important to them?"
Integration	Mental health services and supports include more than just medication and therapy sessions – cost-effective treatment also includes community-based supports.
	"How will you make sure that the health care system most effectively partners with the community to treat mental health and substance use conditions?"
Criminal Justice	As jails and prisons have become the largest behavioral health providers, support for evidence-based jail diversion programs has grown. Unfortunately, most of these programs are funded by short-term grants, which hurt their effectiveness and sustainability.
	"How will you use policy to sustainably finance jail diversion programs that build our communities and reduce taxpayer costs?"
Veterans	More than half a million Iraq and Afghanistan war vets have not sought care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), even though 20 percent of vets have PTSD or depression, and another 20 percent report traumatic brain injury (TBI) during deployment. Cumulative deployments also have contributed to more mental health diagnoses among military spouses and higher rates of emotional difficulties for children of service members.
	"What are your plans to make sure we fulfill our duty to our military service members, families, and Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are in need of mental health services?"
Work Require-ments	States are moving to require people covered under Medicaid to meet and report minimum work hours. Most people on Medicaid do work, maintaining health coverage keeps people at work, and mental health conditions are episodic sometimes making it difficult for people to work or report hours.
	"How will you see that any changes in Medicaid do not cause people with mental health needs to lose coverage, which is essential for their health and their ability to work?"

Major Party Platforms

National Democratic Party Platform Excerpts*

Honoring Indigenous Tribal Nations: "We will work to fully fund the Indian Health Service, Tribal, and Urban Indian health care to ensure that all American Indians have adequate, safe, and affordable access to primary care providers, including oral health, mental health practitioners, and substance abuse treatment options" (22).

Supporting Community Health Centers: "We must renew our commitment to Community Health Centers, as well as community mental health centers and family planning centers. These health centers provide critically important, community-based prevention and treatment in underserved communities, prevent unnecessary and expensive trips to emergency rooms, and are essential to the successful implementation of the ACA" (35).

Combating Drug and Alcohol Addiction: "We must confront the epidemic of drug and alcohol addiction, specifically the opioid crisis and other drugs plaguing our communities, by vastly expanding access to prevention and treatment, supporting recovery, helping community organizations, and promoting better practices by prescribers" (36).

Treating Mental Health: "We must treat mental health issues with the same care and seriousness that we treat issues of physical health, support a robust mental health workforce, and promote better integration of the behavioral and general health care systems. Recognizing that maintaining good mental health is critical to all people, including young people's health and development, we will work with health professionals to ensure that all children have access to mental health care. We must also expand community-based treatment for substance abuse disorders and mental health conditions and fully enforce our parity law. And we should create a national initiative around suicide prevention across the lifespan—to move toward to HHS-promoted Zero Suicide commitment" (36).

Preventing Gun Violence: "We will fight back against attempts to make it harder for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives to revoke federal licenses from law breaking gun dealers, and ensure guns do not fall into the hands of terrorists, intimate partner abusers, other violent criminals, and those with severe mental health issues" (39).

Veterans and Service Members: "We must also look for more ways to make certain the [Department of Veterans Affairs] provides veteran-centric care, such as providing women with full and equal treatment, including productive services; expanding mental health programs; continuing efforts to identify and treat invisible, latent, and toxic wounds of war; treating post-traumatic stress; and expanding the post-9/11 veteran's caregiver program to include all veterans. We reject attempts by Republicans to sell out the needs of veterans by privatizing the VA. We believe that the VA must be fully resourced so that every veteran gets the care that he or she has earned and deserves, including those suffering from sexual assault, mental illness, and other injuries or ailments" (41).

***From the 2016 National Democratic Party Platform**

Major Party Platforms

National Republican Party Platform Excerpts*

Preserving Medicare and Medicaid:	"Block granting Medicaid is particularly needed to address mental health care. Mental illness affects people from all walks of life, but there has been very little success in developing effective system-wide medical models for addressing mental health. For a variety of unique reasons, government is often the first frontier for people experiencing mental health problems—from first responders who deal with crises to publicly funded mental health facilities to prisons where large numbers of inmates suffer from mental illnesses" (24).
Choice in Education:	"We opposed school-based clinics that provide referral or counseling for abortion and contraception and believe that federal funds should not be used in mandatory or universal mental health, psychiatric, or socio-emotional screening programs" (34).
Ensuring Safe Neighborhoods: Criminal Justice and Prison Reform:	"Along with diversion of first-time nonviolent offenders to community sentencing, accountability courts, drug courts, veteran's treatment courts, and guidance by faith-based institutions with proven track records of rehabilitation, our platform emphasized restorative justice to make the victim whole and put the offender on the right path. As variants of these reforms are undertaken in many states, we urge the Congress to learn from what works. In the past, judicial discretion about sentences led to serious mistakes concerning dangerous criminals. Mandatory minimum sentencing became an important tool for keeping them off the streets. Modifications to it should be targeted toward particular categories, especially nonviolent offenders and persons with drug, alcohol, or mental health issues, and should require disclosure by the courts of any judicial departure from the state's sentencing requirements" (39).
Combatting Drug Abuse:	"Heroin and opioid abuse touches our communities, our homes, and our families in ways that have grave effects on Americans in every community. With a quadrupling of both their sales and their overdose deaths, the opioid crisis is ravaging communities all over the country, often hitting rural areas harder than urban. Because of over-prescription of drugs is such a large part of the problem, Republican legislation now allows Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage plans to limit patients to a single pharmacy. Congressional Republicans have also called upon the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to ensure that no physician will be penalized for limiting opioid prescriptions" (40).
Honoring and Supporting Our Veterans: A Sacred Obligation:	"Like the rest of American medicine, the VA faces a critical shortage of primary care and mental health physicians. That's why there are long waiting times to see a doctor and why doctors are often frustrated by the limited time they have with their patients. This is especially the care with mental health care, which often amounts to prescribing drugs because there are not enough psychologists and psychiatrists to do anything else. Inadequate treatment of PTSD drives other problems like suicide, homelessness, and unemployment. This situation may not be quickly reversed, but a Republican administration will begin, on day one, to undertake the job" (45).

***From the 2016 National Republican Party Platform**

Raising Mental Health Awareness

Sharing on social media

There are endless opportunities to raise the profile of mental health in the 2018 midterm elections on the Internet. Use the power of social media to bring attention to mental health and the elections. These are some of our favorite ideas:

- Post about the election on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or write a blog post.
- Download the "Vote With Mental Health In Mind" badge **here** and change it to your profile picture.
- Follow national and local mental health advocacy and policy organizations like **MHA** on social media to get the latest on current effects and how they affect individuals with mental health conditions.
- Blog about campaign issues affecting individuals with mental health conditions.

PRO TIP:

Be sure to post from personal accounts. Many employers could take issue with individual opinions from employees via company emails or platforms.

Sample posts

@Senator How will you ensure that children in schools actually get the coordinated mental health services and supports they need to be college or career ready?

[CANDIDATE], How will you use policy to sustainably finance jail diversion programs that build our communities and reduce taxpayer costs?

PRO TIP: If you post on an elected official's Facebook page, make sure to turn on your Constituent Badge → Staffers will likely ignore comments/messages from non-constituents.

Learn more at Facebook.com/townhall

Resources

Relevant Websites & Additional Resources

Local and State Candidate Websites

Visit Project Vote Smart, enter your zip code, and you be directed to information the candidates that will be on YOUR ballot:
http://www.votesmart.org/

Read up on Health Policy

- Kaiser Family Foundation:
  https://www.kff.org/
- Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease:
  https://www.fightchronicdisease.org/resources
- Your Candidates. Your Health:
  http://www.yourcandidatesyourhealth.org/

Major Party Platforms

- Democratic Party Platform
- Republican Party Platform

Voter Registration Information

Registration deadlines:

State-by-state dates: click here

Need to register? Visit:

- The League of Women Voters:
  http://www.vote411.org/
- Project Vote Smart:
  http://votesmart.org/
- Rock the Vote:
  http://www.rockthevote.com/

Voting Law Changes and Updates

The Fair Elections Network:
http://www.fairelectionsnetwork.com/