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## May is Mental Health Month: Wellness Works and is Essential to Leading Full and Productive Lives

by Paddy Kutz, Executive Director  
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Wellness Works—this year’s theme for May is Mental Health Month—calls attention to strategies and approaches that help all Americans achieve wellness and good mental and overall health. “Wellness is essential to living a full and productive life,” said Paddy Kutz, Executive Director of Mental Health America of Licking County. “We may have different ideas about what wellness means, but it involves a set of skills and strategies to prevent the onset or shorten the duration of illness and promote recovery and well-being. It’s about keeping healthy as well as getting healthy.”

Kutz said wellness is more than absence of disease. “It involves complete general, mental and social well-being. Mental health is an essential component of overall health and well-being. The fact is our overall well-being is tied to the balance that exists between our emotional, physical, spiritual and mental health.” Everyone is at risk of the negative effects of stress given the demands and the challenges at work, school and at home.

There are steps that maintain well-being and can help everyone achieve wellness. These involve a balanced diet, regular exercise, enough sleep, a sense of self-worth, development of coping skills that promote resiliency, emotional awareness, and connections to family, friends and the community. These steps should be complemented by taking stock of one’s well-being through regular mental health checkups.

Just as we check our blood pressure and get cancer screenings, it’s a good idea to take periodic stock of our emotional well-being. One recent study said everyone should get their mental health checked as often as they get a physical, and many doctors routinely screen for mental health, which typically includes a series of questions about lifestyle, eating and drinking habits and mental wellness. But a checkup doesn’t necessarily require a special trip to the doctor. There are also online screening tools you can use. While conditions like depression are common—roughly 1 in 4 Americans have a mental health condition—they are extremely treatable. Go online to: [www.mhalc.org](http://www.mhalc.org). Scroll down Site Navigation to Free On-Line Mental Health Screening, click on it and do the depression/and or other screenings.

“Fully embracing the concept of wellness not only improves health in the mind, body and spirit, but also maximizes one’s potential to lead a full and productive life,” Kutz said. Using strategies that promote resiliency and strengthen mental health and prevent mental illness and substance use conditions, leads to improved general health and a healthier society, greater academic achievement by our children, a more productive economy, and families that stay together.

It’s why Wellness Works and is so important and why we need to spread the word. Local activities include:

- A one-day conference on May 30, 2013 at Dawes Arboretum, focusing on peer support services
- Weekly activities for members of the Compeer Social Inclusion and Wellness Program related to the Eight Dimensions of Wellness

- A national webinar presented by SOPHE and MHALC on the unique needs of individuals who experience severe and persistent mental illness and tobacco cessation
- Continuing community programming for families and youth
- The Mile of Quarters Wrap Up on the Newark downtown square on Sat., May 18, 2013 from 10:00 am – 12:00 noon

May is Mental Health Month was started 64 years ago by MHALC's national organization, Mental Health America, to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of mental wellness for everyone.

Mental Health America of Licking County, an affiliate of Mental Health America, is a partner agency of the United Way of Licking County and Mental Health & Recovery for Licking and Knox Counties.