

Psychology Week 2024
#PsychologyWeek

United in Advocacy: Impacting through Collaboration

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Mental health advocacy has played a vital role in all aspects of the fields of Psychology, Social Work, Counseling, Rehabilitation, and other related mental health arenas for decades. Without advocacy addressing policy, best practices, rights of those served and those working in the fields, and the general public, many needs could be overshadowed by lack of awareness and stigma. While many attitudes and policies have changed, there is still more work to be done. Advocates for mental health research, policy, and services are extremely important to this work.

Advocates can be anyone who is interested in supporting and speaking on behalf of specific groups and/or causes. Advocate efforts include educating people about a specific topic, speaking on behalf of groups or organizations that practice activism, speaking on behalf of those who may not be able to, researching a topic and sharing findings, lobbying to influence public policy, and developing strategies to provide visibility to issues and/or marginalized groups. Advocates often use public communication strategies to inform about issues and needs, and some include the following: blogging, posting on social media, volunteering at information booths, showing up for awareness events such as walks, and participating in other grassroots efforts (reviewed by Kubala, K. & Coelho, S. (2021), PsychCentral.com)

Psychologists and other mental health professionals work to advance advocacy efforts by providing essential knowledge that establishes priorities, improves informed decision-making, and resolves policy differences. This level of advocacy work is significantly helpful during testimony to lawmakers, and groups are starting to realize “there is power in numbers”. In March 2024, the Missouri Psychological Association joined with the National Association of Social Workers – Missouri for a legislative advocacy day at the Missouri State Capital. These professionals, along with other intended members of a state-led coalition (Missouri Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers – Missouri, Missouri Association of School Psychologists, Missouri Mental Health Counselors) plan to continue joint efforts in advocating for mental health needs with local lawmakers. By speaking up with a united front, these collaborations hope to ensure public policies are informed by psychological/behavioral science and expertise which can advance mental health fields, raise awareness of their contributions, and garner funding for essential programs.