

First Morris County Stigma-Free Conference Set for November 1

The **Morris County Board of Freeholders** and **Atlantic Health System** in collaboration with the Morris County Stigma-Free Community will hold a [morning of education and recognition on Nov. 1 in Morristown](#).

**MORRIS COUNTY
PROUD TO BE
STIGMA-FREE**

Entitled “Removing the Stigma of Mental Illness and Addiction: Building Healthy Communities,” the event, which is open to the public, will be held at the Morristown Medical Center, part of Atlantic Health System, at 100 Madison Avenue, Morristown, from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. **(Call 973.660.3183 to attend.)**

The purpose of the event is to bring the community together to help:

- Create a non-judgmental environment where individuals with mental illness and addictions feel supported by their community and neighbors
- Encourage people to seek treatment for these illnesses without fear of stigma
- Provide prevention, treatment, & recovery resource information
- Share ideas on stigma free activities — discuss successes and challenges
- Understand what Atlantic Health System is doing to best assist and treat those who struggle with mental illness

Opening comments will be provided by Morris County **Freeholder Kathy DeFillippo** and Morristown Medical Center **President Trish O’Keefe, PhD, RN**. Information about Stigma-Free will be presented by **Laurie Becker**, Director of Morris County’s Division of Community and Behavioral Health Services.

Four guest speakers will provide different perspectives on the issue of dealing with addiction and mental illness, and the importance of a Stigma-Free approach:

- **Bob Davison**, CEO of the Mental Health Association of Morris and Essex Counties;
- **Pamela Garanger** of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill;
- **Melissa Kiritsis** of Jefferson’s JT Connect;
- **James M. Gannon**, Morris County Sheriff.

“The Stigma-Free initiative is an important effort to help all of us understand the problems facing individual residents and families in our county who have to deal with mental illness and substance abuse, and how these illnesses can destroy their lives,” said **Morris County Freeholder Director Doug Cabana**. “We are working to help affected people seek recovery, without fear of stigma or reprisal.”



**Atlantic
Health System**



“Atlantic Health System is committed to building healthier communities, and that involves programs and partnerships outside of the walls of our hospitals,” said **Trish O’Keefe, PhD, RN, president of Morristown Medical Center**. “We aim to provide person-centered care that reflects the unique needs of each individual we’re privileged to serve. Through our ongoing partnerships with Morris County organizations, we’re able to ensure that both medical and psychosocial needs are met.”

The **Freeholder Board** in 2016 passed a [resolution](#) designating Morris County as a Stigma-Free county and asked the county’s 39 towns to consider enrolling. The goal of the Stigma Free initiative is to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover.

“We know there is no Big Government solution to these problems; that it requires a grass roots movement in our towns and schools and businesses to make this work,” said **Freeholder Kathy DeFillippo**, the county governing board’s liaison to human services issues. “We thank all of the 23 towns that have so far joined this countywide effort in taking stand against stigma and fostering treatment and recovery — with no questions asked.”

Stigma-Free also is a campaign that has been embraced by the county’s hospitals and nonprofit organizations, and law enforcement, who have become great partners in this grass-roots movement.

Morris County towns that have passed Stigma-Free resolutions are Boonton, Boonton Township, Butler, Chatham Borough, Denville, Dover, East Hanover, Hanover, Jefferson, Long Hill, Madison, Mendham Borough, Montville, Morris Plains, Morristown, Morris Township, Mountain Lakes, Parsippany, Pequannock, Rockaway Borough, Rockaway Township, Roxbury and Washington Township.

Residents of participating towns are urged to take the Stigma-Free Pledge:

- As a supporter to those who have a mental illness or substance use disorder, I understand the importance of recognizing the high prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorders.
- I also know that when recognition is coupled with reeducation and understanding, health-seeking action can be taken. These actions lead to recovery, which is possible for everyone.
- The Three R’s (recognize, reeducate and reduce) depend on each other to effectively Stamp Out Stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use disorders.
- This is what I, as an individual, charge myself to do—to fully Stamp Out Stigma and clear the path to health-seeking behavior. It begins with me.

Morris County has created a Stigma Free website <https://morriscountystigmafree.org/> to provide information and resources, and a calendar of upcoming events related to mental illness and substance abuse. A Stigma Free Toolkit also is available for towns and communities.

For more information on the disease of mental illness, visit www.nami.org and for more information on NAMI’s national Stigma-Free effort, visit: <https://www.nami.org/stigmafree>

Stigma is defined as a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment by others. When an individual is labeled by their illness they experience judgment and prejudice. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help.