

The following are common questions and concerns. Answers have been adapted from a Department of Health brochure, "There's No Place Like Home," about housing for people with mental illness.

Q: What is mental illness?

A: The term "mental illness" covers a spectrum of psychiatric disabilities that may be severe, temporary or permanent, or even intermittent. At times, symptoms disappear altogether. Mental illness includes disabilities that affect a persons ability to think, feel and relate to others.

People with severe mental illness often have difficulty coping with the demands of ordinary life, are particularly vulnerable to stress and may lack the social skills that are part of everyday functioning. One out of every four families in Hawaii is affected by mental illness.

Q: What do people with mental illness need?

A: People with mental illness need and want basic things such as family and friends, affordable and safe housing and the chance to acquire and utilize job skills. Mental illness, like physical illness, may require specialized treatment.

People who suffer from persistent mental illness may require a program of rehabilitation to assist them in dealing with their disability. Community care is important in the recovery of mental illness.

Studies have shown that when basic supports, including stable and adequate housing are provided, treatment of mental illness is more effective, the frequency of hospitalization is reduced and people lead more productive lives.

Enabling Legislation re: Disabled Persons In the Community

Federal

ADA—On June 22, 1999, the US Supreme Court held in Olmsted v. L.C. that the unnecessary segregation of individuals with disabilities constitutes discrimination based on disability, and under the Americans with Disabilities Act, states are required to provide community-based settings and services enabling people to live in the least restrictive setting.

Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1989 – Prohibits landlords and local zoning ordinance from discriminating against the mentally disabled or those who provide housing for them.

State

Hawaii Revised Statutes, Chapter 334, Part VII—Mental Health Law re: Community Residential Treatment System establishes a statewide system of residential programs which provide a range of services which are alternative to institutional care.

Hawaii Revised Statutes Chapter 46-15.3, Residential Facilities—Defines family for residential zoning purposes as no more than 5 unrelated persons living together as a single housekeeping unit in addition, 8 or fewer persons who reside in residential facilities monitored and/or licensed by the state. Resident managers are not included in the resident count.

County

Residential Zoning—In compliance with HRS Chapter 46-15.3, as noted above.



Opportunities to Begin Again

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Frequently Asked Questions



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Providing Community Housing Programs

Q: What are the most common types of Mental Illness?

A: Just as there are many kinds of physical illness, there are different types of mental illness. The most severe and persistent mental illnesses are:

Schizophrenia—a serious and disabling mental disorder that affects 1 in every 100 people with onset usually occurring in late adolescence.

Those who have schizophrenia experience emotional withdrawal, confused speech and high levels of anxiety. At times, they may hear voices and their thinking may be distorted. At other times, these symptoms may disappear.

Affective disorders—the most common mental illnesses, occurring in about 6 in every 100 people. These disorders are marked by disturbances of mood, and lead to severe depression or emotional highs. They are generally less disabling than schizophrenia.

Less serious or severe mental disorders also include **mild depression, phobias** and **anxiety disorders**.



Q: Do people with mental illness ever get well?

A: Absolutely. About 80% of people suffering from acute mental disorders are discharged from treatment within relatively short period of time. People with mental illness have normal intelligence. Many are college graduates and professionals.

With proper treatment and a supportive environment, people do recover and lead productive lives as contributing members of society.



Q: Why is it important for people with mental illness to live in the community?

A: This is their community too. People with psychiatric disabilities may choose where they want to live, just like everybody else. They have the same privileges and obligations as other citizens.

They do not lose their rights because of their disabilities. They, too, are concerned with such things as neighborhood safety, affordable housing, convenient shopping, access to transportation and proximity to family and friends.



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Q: What about property values?

A: Property values are in no way affected negatively by having people with mental disabilities living in the neighborhood. Many studies have been done on residences for people with mental disabilities.

They all reach the same conclusion: the presence of such a residence does not cause resale prices to go down or property to turn over more often. In fact, some studies show that residences for people with mental disabilities can have a positive effect on a neighborhood by being renovated and well maintained, thus raising property values.

Q: Don't mentally disabled people need supervision?

A: People who will live in the community will be screened and approved for community living. Like all people, they need support during periods of stress. Support services and trained staff are provided to residents.

Q: What if a person with mental illness causes trouble?

A: People with mental disabilities are obligated to obey the law like everyone else.

If you have a problem with someone in your neighborhood, you should try to work it out him or her. You should treat a neighbor with mental illness with the same respect you treat others.

Studies show that because of their mental fragility, people with severe mental illness are more likely to have a crime committed against them, than commit a crime themselves.