

## Mental Illness Awareness Week arrives amid move to community care



Written by  
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Mental health groups in Alabama will mark Mental Illness Awareness Week through Saturday during a period of transition for mental health care in the state.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health is closing state facilities as part of a nationwide move toward community-based treatment as budgets tighten. Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital in Montgomery closed its doors Aug. 31. Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon stopped admissions in September and is expected to close Oct. 31.

But the department said in a news release that the need for treatment is especially strong right now because statistics show that mental illness is more common in difficult economic times.

ADMH said unemployed people are four times more likely to report symptoms of severe mental illnesses than others, and Americans who experience involuntary changes in employment status, such as pay cuts or reduced hours, are twice as likely.

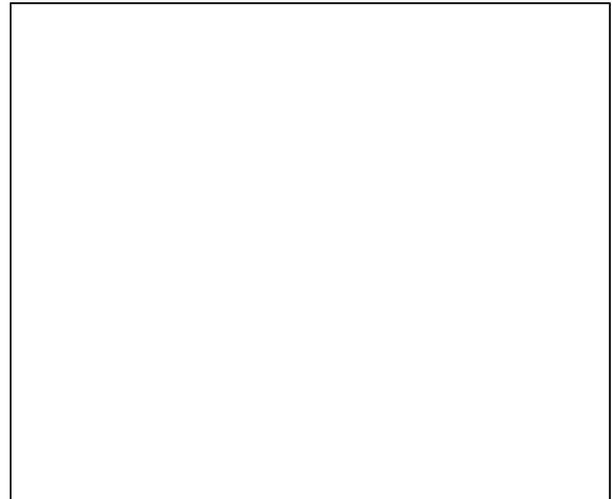
More mental health resources also are needed as troops return from Afghanistan and Iraq, the news release said.

“Many people in our communities are directly affected by mental illnesses,” said Beverly Bell-Shambley, associate commissioner of ADMH’s Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. “The good news is treatment works and recovery is possible, but only if people can get access to that treatment.”

The National Alliance on Mental Illness has sponsored the week’s events for more than 20 years. to spotlight the issue and reduce stigma.

This year, several NAMI Alabama affiliates are planning events. The Mobile group will hold an “Unmasking Mental Illness” kickoff gala Friday and its third annual Friends and Family Walk for Mental Illness on Saturday. More information about events can be found at [namialabama.org](http://namialabama.org).

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