

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**‘Life with a Mental Illness’ Theme Highlights Importance of Speaking up and Sharing  
#whatmentalillnessfeelslike  
May is Mental Health Month**

**Eau Claire, WI, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016** – When mental illnesses or disorders are talked about, the language typically used to describe them tends to be clinical and impersonal. These words, while useful for doctors or clinicians, often don’t do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like. This year’s theme for Mental Health Month—‘Life with a Mental Illness’—is encouraging people to share what life with a mental illness feels like for someone going through it.

In the 2015 Community Needs Assessment, Eau Claire County residents identified Mental Health as the top health priority. About 75% of people in Eau Claire County with a mental health condition receive no treatment at all for their illness. The goal of Mental Health Month is to raise awareness about mental health conditions. When mental health symptoms are addressed before they are severe, people can often recover quickly, and live full and productive lives.

“Mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. We need to speak up early and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone,” says Lieske Giese, Director/Health Officer of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. “Sharing is the key to breaking down the stigma around mental illnesses. It also shows others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms.”

**This Mental Health Month, we are encouraging people to speak up about how it feels to live with a mental illness by tagging social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike.** Posting with this hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

It is important to address mental health early by recognizing the risk factors and signs of mental illness and understanding what mental illness is and isn’t. It is also important to know how and where to get help when needed. Speaking out about what mental illness feels like can encourage others to recognize symptoms early on in the disease process and can help people be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need. “Telling people how life with a mental illness feels helps build support from friends and family, reduces stigma and discrimination, and is key to recovery,” concludes Giese.

For more information on activities in your community evolved around mental health, considering joining Eau Claire Healthy Communities, Mental Health Action Team. For more information, visit [www.ehealthychommunities.org](http://www.ehealthychommunities.org) For more Mental Health Month information, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may) and follow the Eau Claire City-County Health Department on Facebook.

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