



Ohio Department of  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



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## **May is Mental Health Month**

*State Agencies Mark Observance With Launch of “Thrive Outside” Initiative, Other Efforts*

(COLUMBUS, OH) – In recognition of May as Mental Health Month, the Ohio Departments of Mental Health and Drug Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and Natural Resources (ODNR) joined forces to launch a new initiative aimed at helping Ohioans recharge, refresh, and #ThriveOutside. Supported by a robust social media campaign, English- and Spanish-language commercials, and a free app that shows the locations of nearby parks and hiking trails, the [Thrive Outside initiative](#) encourages Ohioans to take in Ohio’s natural beauty and wonders as a means of achieving balance and wellness.

“This past year presented many different challenges and obstacles that tested our strength and resiliency. The global pandemic forced us to cope with situations we never even imagined, and a lot of us struggled with our mental health as a result. The good news is that there are many free tools and resources available to support our well-being,” said OhioMHAS Director Lori Criss. “Enjoying the outdoors is not only beneficial for our physical health, evidence shows that spending just fifteen minutes outdoors also lowers stress, improves our mood, and enhances our sense of well-being. There’s no waiting, no appointment needed, and no prescription required. The refills are endless.”

“The healing benefits of time spent in nature are well-documented,” added ODNR Director Mary Mertz. “Now is the perfect time to rediscover Ohio and take advantage of the restorative benefits our great outdoor spaces provide us. With thousands of miles of trails, Ohio offers nearly endless opportunities to get outside and explore.”

To help Ohioans connect with nature, ODNR offers a free app called [DETOUR](#) that allows users to identify nearby parks and trails – including [ODNR’s Storybook Trails](#), which feature several titles from the [Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library](#) -- from their home computers or on the go via their smartphones. Posters have also been placed throughout the Ohio State Parks system to alert visitors to the physical and mental health benefits of the great outdoors.

For those who need more than just the tranquility of getting outside, the initiative also reminds Ohioans to take advantage of Ohio’s toll-free CareLine (1.800.720.9616). Trained counselors are available 24/7 to provide confidential emotional support, and if necessary, refer callers to treatment and recovery support services in their community.

Throughout May, OhioMHAS will also promote a variety of traditional resources and tools to help combat the stigma surrounding mental health. The Department is promoting awareness resources available through [Mental Health America](#) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#). OhioMHAS is also partnering with the Ohio Department of Insurance to hold a mental health action day on May 20th, featuring a [Twitter Q&A](#) and an evening phone bank to answer questions about behavioral health care benefits. In addition, OhioMHAS will be releasing a [four-part video series](#) teaching caregivers to know the signs and symptoms of mental illness, strategies for managing problem behaviors, how to access treatment, and how to pay for that treatment.

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“We want Ohioans to know it’s OK to not be OK, help is available and there are things individuals can do throughout their daily lives to prioritize mental health, build resiliency, and continue to cope with the obstacles of COVID-19 and other stressors,” said Director Criss. “It’s important to remember that working on your mental health and finding tools that help you thrive takes time. Change won’t happen overnight. Instead, by focusing on small changes, you can move through the stressors of the past year and develop long-term strategies to support yourself on an ongoing basis.”

A great starting point for anyone who is ready to start prioritizing their mental health is to take a mental health screening at [MHAscreening.org](https://MHAscreening.org). It’s a quick, free, and confidential way for someone to assess their mental health and begin finding hope and healing. Of the almost half million individuals who have already completed the anxiety screening, 79 percent showed symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety, according to Mental Health America’s website.

Practical tools such as Thrive Outside, the Ohio CareLine, screenings, and other resources, can help improve mental health. These efforts are focused on managing anger and frustration, recognizing when trauma may be affecting mental health, challenging negative thinking patterns, and encouraging individuals to make time to take care for self.

Ultimately, during this month of May, OhioMHAS and its partners remind every Ohioan that mental illnesses are real, but also that help is available, and recovery is possible.

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### **Media Contacts:**

**OhioMHAS:** Eric Wandersleben, [eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov](mailto:eric.wandersleben@mha.ohio.gov) | 614.359.6754

**ODNR:** Stephanie O’Grady | [Stephanie.O'Grady@dnr.ohio.gov](mailto:Stephanie.O'Grady@dnr.ohio.gov) | 614.265.8680