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**TO: AL MEDIA**  
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**MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**  
**“DARE TO CARE – STOP EXCLUSION”**

The month of October has been declared Mental Health Awareness month with the objective of not only educating the public about mental health but also to reduce the stigma and discrimination that people with mental illness are often subjected to.

An estimated 400 million people worldwide suffer from mental or neurological disorders or from psychosocial problems. These include disorders related to alcohol and drug abuse. The theme for this year is, “Don’t fear those experiencing a mental illness. It can happen to anyone. Dare to challenge the myths and the misconceptions.”

The MEC for Health Mrs. Peggy Nkonyeni says people with mental illnesses should never suffer alone, “People with mental illnesses, disorder or disabilities often have no one to care for them and many are being discriminated against that is why as the department of health we have the National Mental Health Care Act No 17 of 2002 which seeks to protect the rights and dignity of people with mental disabilities. We must give them the necessary support. It is also important for people to know that some of these mental disorders and diseases are treatable,” says the MEC.

There are a number of misconceptions and myths about mental illnesses and mental disorders. The following are the most common misconceptions and myths that people often associate with mental illnesses and disorders:

**Are mental and brain disorders just a figment of one’s imagination?**

**No**, they are real illnesses that cause suffering and disability.

**Is it impossible to help someone with a mental or brain disorder?**

**No**, treatments exist. Something can be done for all mental and neurological disorders. Some people recover completely, others have a more difficult time, but in all cases there can be an alleviation of suffering through different methods. Help can be found from the medical profession at two levels, in the form of general health workers such as doctors and nurses and then with specialized health workers such as psychologists, psychiatrists (for mental disorders) and neurologists (for brain disorders).

**Are mental or brain disorders brought on by a weakness in character?**

**No.** They are caused by biological, psychological and social factors. Mental illness is one of the major afflictions of mankind that has had little support in the past. During the last half century there has been quite a revolution in the understanding and treatment of major mental illness such as depression, schizophrenia, manic depression and anxiety. Rather than a flaw in the character or a consequence of dysfunctional family, research has shown that mental illness has biological roots.

**Should we just lock up persons with a mental illness?**

**No.** People with a mental illness can function and should not be isolated. People with a mental disorder need love and attention and care just like everyone else.

Like physical disorders mental and brain disorders vary in severity. There are those that are:

- Transient (like an acute stress disorder)
- Periodic (like bipolar disorder, characterized by periods of exaggerated elation followed by periods of depression)
- Long lasting and progressive (like Alzheimer's disease)

**You can visit your nearest clinic or hospital for assistance or information about mental health**

**ENDS**

**For more information please contact Leon Mbangwa on 083 459 8695**