



Vote like your mental health depends on it.

Mental Health Young Adult Voter Guide 2024

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Introduction

About Mental Health America and Active Minds



MHA
Mental Health America

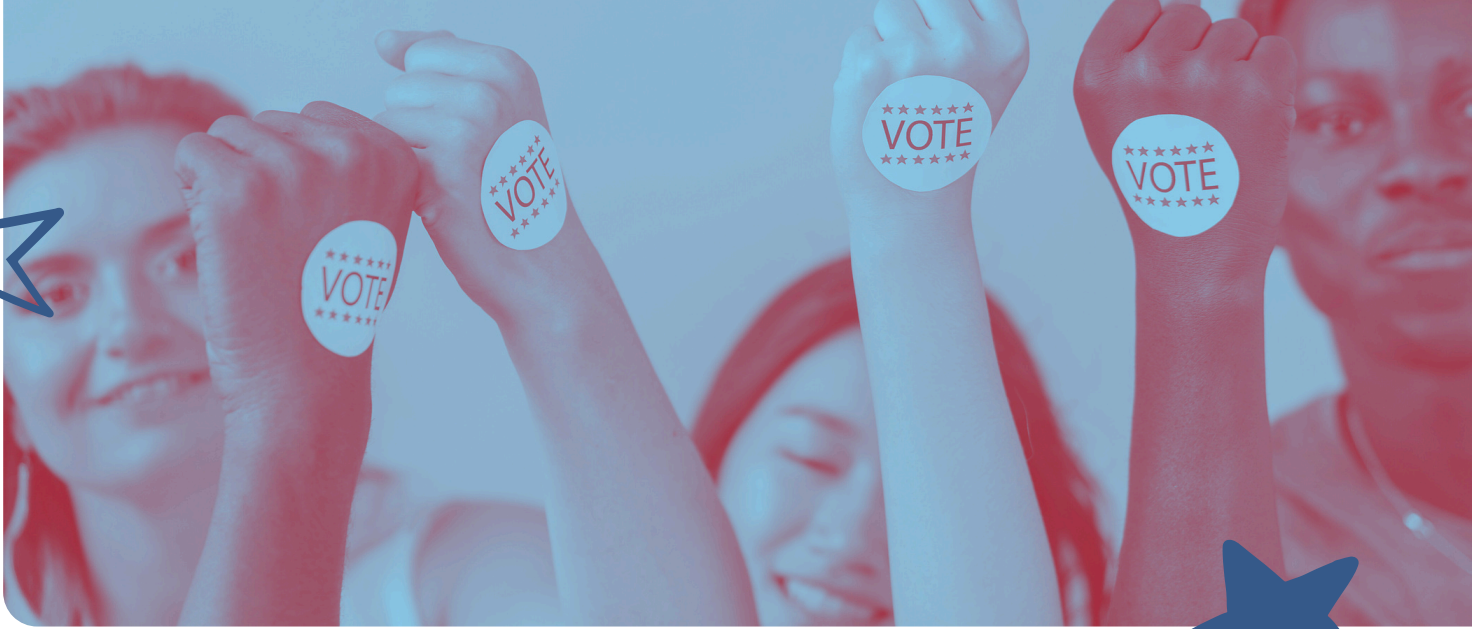
Mental Health America is the nation's leading nonprofit dedicated to mental health promotion, well-being, and illness prevention. Founded in 1909, MHA's work is informed by those most affected.



**active
minds**

Active Minds is the nation's premier nonprofit organization supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults. Founded in 2003, Active Minds is dedicated to saving lives and building stronger families and communities by empowering young adults to speak openly about mental health.

Together, Active Minds and Mental Health America have partnered to create this Youth Mental Health Voter Guide for the 2024 election.



Mission Statement

Our mission is to empower young voters to make informed decisions that prioritize mental health in the 2024 election. We aim to:

1. Provide clear, accessible information on mental health policies and their impact on daily life.
2. Offer tools to evaluate candidates' stances on mental health issues.
3. Inspire civic engagement among youth, particularly those affected by mental health challenges.
4. Emphasize the power of local and state elections in shaping mental health care.

Why Mental Health and Voting Matter for Young Adults

As a young adult, your voice and vote have the power to shape the future of mental health care in America. Here's why your participation is crucial:

1. **Direct Impact:** Policies decided by elected officials directly affect access to mental health services, insurance coverage, and funding for research and prevention programs.
2. **Representation:** By voting, you ensure that the mental health concerns of your generation are heard and considered by policymakers.
3. **Long-term Change:** While immediate results aren't always visible, consistent civic engagement contributes to gradual, meaningful progress in mental health care.
4. **Intersectionality:** Mental health intersects with many other issues young voters care about, including education, healthcare, social justice, and economic policy.
5. **Breaking Stigma:** Engaging in the political process around mental health helps normalize these discussions and reduces societal stigma.

Quick Facts:



Mental Health and the 2024 Election

Key Statistics

According to research from Active Minds and TimelyCare (2024):

66.4%

of college students are interested in voting for leaders who support mental health policies.

61.5%

are interested in advocating for these policies.

51.1%

of college students are unfamiliar with local, state, and federal policies that support mental health.

Source: Active Minds and TimelyCare (2024). *Mind Over Matter: Amplifying the Student Voice for Mental Health Policy.*

Top Mental Health Concerns for Youth

According to research, the top concerns of youth and young adults include:



Access to Healthcare

(because mental health is health, and everyone deserves comprehensive care)



Affordable Housing

(because a stable home is crucial for mental well-being)



Economic Equity

(because financial stress shouldn't dictate our mental health)



Racial Justice

(because discrimination takes a toll on mental health)



Climate Crisis

(because eco-anxiety is real, folks!)

Source: Active Minds and TimelyCare (2024). *Mind Over Matter: Amplifying the Student Voice for Mental Health Policy.*

Voter Registration



The first step to voting with mental health in mind is registering to vote.

Registration deadlines before primary and general elections vary state to state, so don't wait to find out the cutoff date. You can use any of the following resources to find state-specific information on registering to vote, re-registering, voting methods, deadlines to register, and more.

What Voter Registration Is

- A declaration of your eligibility and intent to vote
- A way to provide your current information to election officials
- A process that varies by state but is required in most states

What Voter Registration Is Not

- A commitment to vote in every election
- A party affiliation (though some states ask for this information)
- A guarantee of eligibility (officials still verify your information)

Benefits of Registering To Vote

- **Early Voting:** Many states offer in-person early voting before Election Day
- **Mail-in Voting:** You can request absentee or mail-in ballots in most states
- **Election Day Voting:** You can vote in person at your designated polling place
- **Primary Elections:** Registration often allows participation in primary elections

How to Register:

The first step to voting with mental health in mind is registering to vote. Registration deadlines before primary and general elections vary state to state, so don't wait to find out the cutoff date. You can use any of the following resources to find state-specific information on registering to vote, re-registering, voting methods, deadlines to register, and more.

- **Rock the Vote:** rockthevote.org This resource shows a list of your current elected officials and offers educational information on the democratic process.
- **Election Protection:** 866ourvote.org Call: 1-866-OUR-VOTE Text: 866-687-8683 Hotlines in Spanish, Arabic, and Asian languages.
- **Project Vote Smart:** votesmart.org This resource displays a list of all the candidates and ballot measures up for consideration in your area.

Pre-Registering to Vote: Getting Ready for Your First Election

What is Pre-Registration?

Pre-registration allows you to sign up to vote before you're eligible to cast a ballot. This means you'll be automatically registered when you turn 18, ensuring you're ready to participate in your first election as soon as you're of age.

Age Requirements

- Many states allow individuals to pre-register to vote before they turn 18.
- The minimum age for pre-registration varies by state, typically ranging from 16 to 17 years old.
- Some states allow pre-registration if you will be 18 by the next general election.

State-Specific Examples

- [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Delaware](#), [District of Columbia](#), [Florida](#), [Hawaii](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New York](#), [North Carolina](#), [Oregon](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [Utah](#) allow 16 year olds to pre-register.
- Georgia allows pre-registration at 17 years and 6 months old.
- Alaska allows pre-registration within 90 days of your 18th birthday.

Benefits of Pre-Registration

- Increases turnout and engagement for young voters, who are historically less likely to vote.
- Allows you to be ready to vote as soon as you turn 18.
- Gets you involved in the democratic process early.

How to Pre-Register

- Check your state's specific rules on the minimum age for pre-registration.
- In many states, you can pre-register when getting a driver's license or state ID.
- You can also pre-register online through your state's election website or in person at your local election office.
- The process is often the same as regular voter registration.

Important Notes

- Pre-registered voters are automatically registered to vote when they turn 18.
- You cannot vote until you reach the legal voting age (18 in most cases), even if you're pre-registered.
- As of the latest data, 52% of the voting-eligible population lives in states that allow 16 year olds to pre-register.

Take Action

- Find out if your state allows pre-registration and at what age.
- Mark your calendar for when you're eligible to pre-register.
- Encourage your friends who are eligible to pre-register as well.
- Stay informed about the issues that matter to you so you're ready to vote when the time comes.

Remember: Voter registration laws can change, so always check with your state's official election website for the most up-to-date information on pre-registration rules and procedures.

By pre-registering, you're taking an important step in civic engagement. You're saying that you're ready and willing to make your voice heard as soon as you're eligible. It's a great way to ensure you don't miss out on your first opportunity to vote!

Key Dates:

October 29, 2024: Vote Early Day

November 5, 2024: General Election Day

December 17, 2024: Electoral College meets to cast votes

January 3, 2025: 119th Congress convenes, new members are sworn in

January 6, 2025: Congress counts electoral votes and certifies the election results

January 20, 2025: Inauguration Day for the next president

Voter Rights:

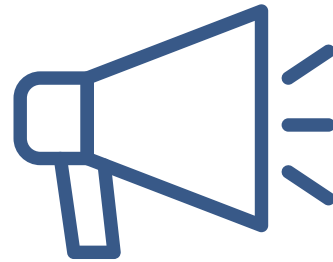
More than one in five Americans experience some type of mental health condition, and it is crucial that all members of every community understand that individuals with mental health conditions, substance use conditions, and other disabilities have the right to vote and have the right to additional assistance.

Find more information about the accommodations you are entitled to under the law using these resources:

- **Bazon Center for Mental Health Law Voting Guide:** This resource was created for people living with psychiatric disabilities and autism. It includes information on state laws and direction about legal competency and guardianship.
- **SABE's (Self-Advocates Become Empowered) GoVoter Project:** This resource offers accessible trainings on how to exercise your rights as a voter with a disability and includes information for caregivers.
- **Your Vote Counts:** This resource from the Autistic Self Advocacy Network is a voting toolkit with easy reading and plain language editions.
- **The National Disability Rights Network:** This organization offers the ability to connect with others through a Power at the Polls page and helps clarify questions around help for voting tasks in a memo on the right to assistance.

Remember: Your vote is your voice in the fight for better mental health policies. Don't let anything stop you from being heard!

Understanding the Impact of Your Vote



Local vs. National Elections

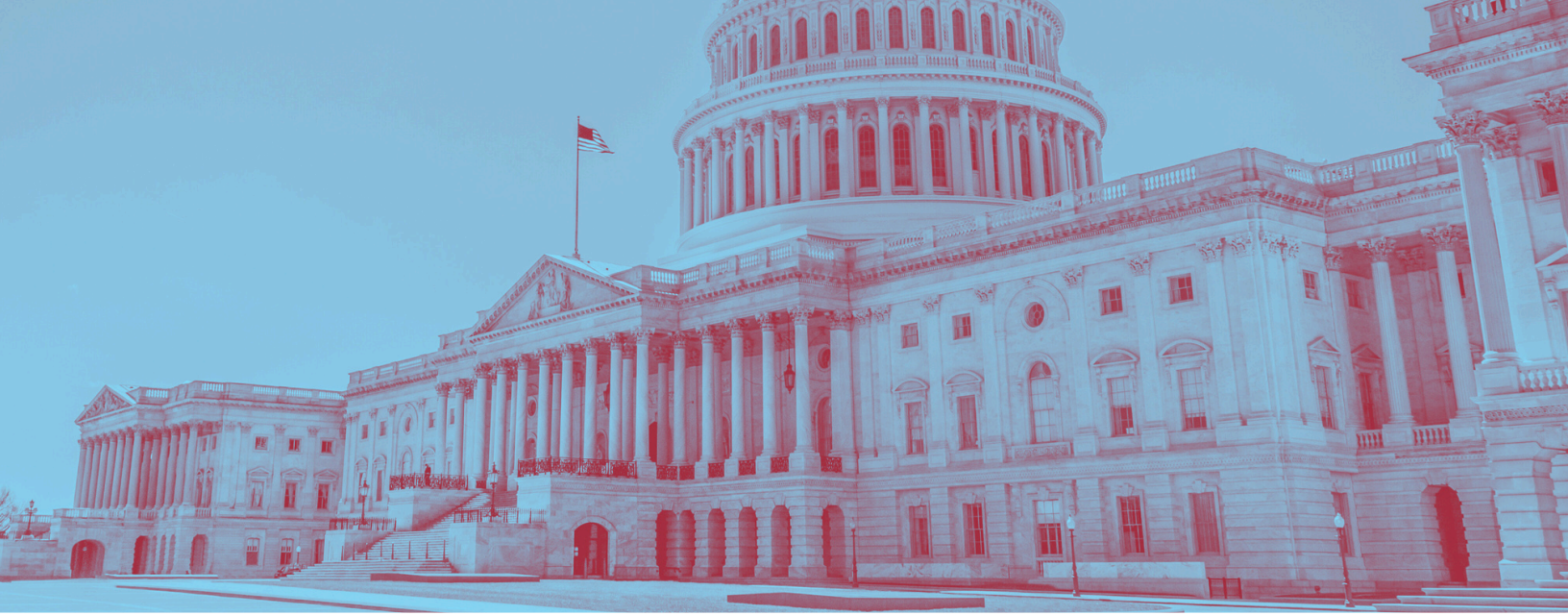
While national elections get the spotlight, local elections often have a more direct effect on your daily life. Your vote can influence education policies, local mental health resources, and community development.

The 2024 election isn't just about choosing the next president. Our nation is also electing:

- **More than 30 U.S. senators**
- **All 435 members of the House of Representatives**
- **11 governors**
- **Countless state and local officials**

Each of these roles can significantly impact mental health and well-being in your community.





How Elected Officials Influence Mental Health Policies

Your vote has the power to:

- Advance policies that promote mental health and overall well-being
- Protect and expand access to comprehensive health care, including mental health services
- Support initiatives that address social determinants of mental health, such as housing, education, and economic stability
- Safeguard the rights and dignity of individuals with mental health conditions
- Continue the progress that mental health advocates have fought hard to achieve over the years

Remember: Your vote matters. It can help build on the foundation laid by years of advocacy work, pushing for better policies and ensuring that mental health remains a priority.

Researching Candidates and Issues



Where to Find Information

To get to know the candidates on your ballot:

- Start with [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org): Enter your address to see a personalized ballot
- Use [Ballotpedia's Sample Ballot Lookup tool](#): Enter your address to see which candidates will be on your ballot
- For each candidate: Look for their official campaign website
- Visit your state's Secretary of State or Board of Elections website: Look for a list of certified candidates
- For local candidates: Check your county or city election office website
- Use fact-checking resources: Sites like [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org), [PolitiFact](https://www.politifact.com), or [OpenSecrets](https://www.opensecrets.org) for campaign finance information
- Be cautious of unofficial sources or unverified social media accounts

Remember: Information availability may vary, especially for local races. If you can't find information online, consider attending local candidate forums or reaching out to campaigns directly.



Suggested Candidate Questions on Mental Health Policies



Questions

How will you ensure increased funding for mental health services, particularly for underserved communities in both urban and rural areas?

What is your plan to integrate mental health education and support services into schools, and how will you ensure students can easily access these services?

Given the mental health crisis, how will you ensure mental health care is comprehensively covered by health insurance, including telehealth services?

How do you plan to address the shortage of mental health professionals, especially in underserved areas?

What specific policies will you support to address the growing mental health challenges faced by young people, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Taking Action



Attend Town Halls and Local Events

Asking a question at a town hall meeting is a great way to make candidates go "on the record" with their positions on important mental health and substance use disorder issues. Candidates rely on their constituents to bring up the highest priority community issues, so asking a question whenever you can will help them remember to keep mental health top of mind.

Remember, as a constituent, you have the right to ask questions and expect clear answers from your representatives. These officials are elected to serve your interests and address the issues that matter most to you.

Check your local paper, online news source, or candidate websites for scheduled candidate forums and town hall meetings and plan to bring up these topics and questions. If you cannot ask a formal question, wait in line to talk to the candidate or raise it when they are shaking hands with attendees. Any way you can get their attention on mental health is helpful. Events for members of Congress may occur when they are not in session ([find the session calendar here](#)) and in their home districts and states campaigning.



Questions for Town Halls or Local Events



Questions

Many young people struggle with both mental health challenges and substance use disorders. How will you make it easier for youth to access integrated treatment for both issues?

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people. What will you do to improve suicide prevention efforts and crisis response systems?

How do you plan to expand community-based mental health support, such as peer counseling and crisis intervention, to reduce reliance on emergency services?

Young adults are facing financial stress from student debt, unaffordable housing, and job insecurity. What will you do to address the mental health impacts of economic instability?

Social media is contributing to mental health issues among youth. How will you hold tech companies accountable and make social media safer for young people?



Access to Mental Health and Substance Use Care and Supports

Because insurance coverage is critical to accessing mental health and substance use services, ensuring health insurance policies cover as many people and services as possible is key. This is especially critical as the public health emergency expired and Medicaid programs are disenrolling hundreds of thousands of people. Some candidates support very limited plans that don't offer mental health and substance use services so be sure to try to find out whether the coverage they support will include mental health and substance use care.



Question

Having health insurance coverage is really important to accessing mental health and substance use services and supports, but there are too many people that do not have plans with adequate coverage, or any plan at all. How will you make sure people have health insurance coverage that will give them access to mental health and substance use care and supports?



Importance of Addressing the Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis

It is important to let candidates know why you care about this issue, so very briefly tell them about your background as a person with lived experience, or as a family member, friend, or provider. Then ask what they are going to do to address the mental health and substance use crisis. Asking a broad question will allow you to see if they have really thought about this and evaluate whether you think their plan would help in your community.



Question

Many young people struggle with both mental health issues and substance use at the same time. How will you make it easier for youth to get help for both of these problems together?

Why This Matters:

- Many young adults dealing with mental health issues also have problems with drugs or alcohol, and vice versa.
- Getting help for both issues at the same time is really important, but it's often hard to find or afford.
- Young people facing these challenges are more likely to end up in the hospital or become homeless.
- There aren't enough doctors and therapists trained to treat both problems together.
- Many people feel ashamed to ask for help, which makes things worse.



Questions

I am a(n) [advocate, person living with a mental health or substance use condition, family member, or friend]. I see a tremendous need for mental health care in my community and know people who cannot get help for mental health and substance use conditions when they need it. If elected, what will you do to address this unmet need and how will that make a difference in what we are seeing every day in our community?

As a young person, I've seen many of my peers struggle to get mental health help. Only half of youth who need services actually get them. What's your plan to make mental health care more accessible for young people in schools and community settings?

Housing and Involuntary Hospitalization

Many people without homes struggle with mental health and substance use issues. At the same time, not having a stable place to live can cause or worsen mental health problems like depression and PTSD.



Question

Given the ethical concerns and limited effectiveness of involuntary hospitalization as a solution for homelessness and mental health issues, how do you plan to address the root causes of homelessness, such as the lack of affordable housing and access to mental health services, while ensuring the protection of individual rights and personal freedoms?

Some cities and states are trying to solve this by forcing people into hospitals. But this approach has serious problems:

- It raises ethical concerns about personal freedom
- People often end up going in and out of hospitals without getting real help
- It doesn't address the root cause: lack of affordable housing and support

Research shows that better solutions include:

- Providing housing first, without requiring people to be "treatment ready"
- Offering community-based help, like mental health services and job training
- Using peer support, where people who've been through similar experiences help others

To learn more:

- Mental Health America's position on supportive housing: [MHA Supportive Housing](#)
- National League of Cities' article on housing and mental health: [NLC Housing and Mental Health](#)

Racial Justice

Recent data paints a stark picture of racial inequities in mental health among youth:

- The CDC's 2021/2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that Black students feel less safe at school and experience higher rates of bullying compared to their white peers.
- Between 2018 and 2022, the suicide rate among Black youth rose by more than 50%, surpassing that of white youth for the first time.
- In 2021, about 20% of Black high school students reported seriously considering suicide, with 15% reporting attempts.
- Black youth are less likely to receive mental health treatment despite similar or higher rates of mental health challenges.
- Institutional and interpersonal racism, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, contribute significantly to suicide risk factors for Black youth.

These alarming trends underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions, improved access to culturally competent care, and policies that address systemic inequities in mental health support for communities of color.



Question

In light of ongoing conversations about the impact of systemic racism, including disparities in access to mental health care, what specific policies would you implement to ensure equitable mental health support for communities of color, and how would you address the cultural and systemic barriers that currently exist?

Youth Issues

Only half of youth who need mental health services actually get them. Often, youth only receive these services very late. Two places where young people can get better access to services are in primary care settings and schools.



Question

Many students don't have access to mental health professionals at school. What's your plan to increase the number of counselors, psychologists, and social workers in schools?

Social Media

Question: The Surgeon General and leading youth mental health organizations have declared a national emergency in youth mental health and we know that only half of youth who need help actually get it. How will you ensure that youth will have better access to mental health care in their communities – in schools and in pediatrician’s offices?

Social media has also become a pressing issue affecting youth mental health, yet some tech companies have spent millions to successfully lobby against any new regulations to make their platforms safer. There are currently state and federal laws being proposed to hold tech companies accountable.



Question

We know social media platforms are designed to make money, not to promote mental health, and this affects young people who spend many hours online. What will you do if elected to make social media safer and more responsive to the needs of young people and their families?

Follow-up points to consider:

- Age restrictions and parental controls
- Transparency in algorithm design
- Limits on data collection and targeted advertising to youth
- Funding for digital literacy and mental health education
- Support for research on social media's impact on youth mental health

Remember: Your experiences with social media are valuable insights. Don't hesitate to share personal anecdotes (while respecting your privacy) to illustrate why this issue matters to you and your peers.



Economic Stress and Youth Mental Health

Economic pressures are taking a significant toll on young people's mental health. With skyrocketing student debt, unaffordable housing, and an uncertain job market, many young adults are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety about their financial futures. These economic stressors aren't just impacting bank accounts – they're directly affecting mental well-being, leading to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and burnout among youth. As young voters, it's crucial to understand how candidates plan to address these interconnected issues of economic stability and mental health.



Questions

Many young people are stressed about student debt, housing costs, and job insecurity. How will your economic policies address these stressors and support youth mental health?

Young people today face increasing economic pressures that can impact mental health. What strategies do you propose to promote economic equality and reduce financial stressors that contribute to mental health issues, particularly among marginalized and low-income communities?

Other Issues That Affect Mental Health

We all care about issues that are not directly about mental health, but still have an impact on mental health. Here are a few examples, but this is not exhaustive:

Reproductive rights: Lack of control over when, whether, and how to have a family affects mental health.

Restrictions on gender-affirming care or other restrictions affecting LGBTQ+ populations: Many state laws have placed restrictions on gender-affirming care, access to restroom facilities, or other services. Research has shown that such restrictions are having a negative effect on the mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals who have high rates of suicidality and depression due to these barriers and others.



Question

I am very concerned about [climate change, reproductive rights, access to health care for transgender young people, etc.] because of the devastating effects of this issue on mental health. What will you do to address the issue and how will your solution also address the mental health consequences of current policies?

Host a Candidate Q&A

Want to make mental health a key issue in your community? Consider hosting a Q&A session with local candidates! Here's how:

1. **Start Small:** Focus on local races like city council, school board, or state representatives. These candidates are often more accessible and eager to engage with voters.
2. **Team Up:** Partner with campus groups or community organizations. This can help with logistics and boost attendance.
3. **Plan Ahead:**
 - Give yourself at least a month to organize.
 - Choose a neutral, accessible venue.
 - Decide on a format (e.g., moderated panel, town hall style).
4. **Invite Candidates:**
 - Invite all qualified candidates for a given office.
 - Reach out early and be flexible with dates.
 - Provide clear information about the event's purpose and format.
5. **Prepare Questions:**
 - Focus on local mental health issues and policies.
 - Mix prepared questions with audience submissions.
 - Ensure that questions are fair, impartial, and open-ended, rather than focused on any specific candidate's positions or accomplishments.
6. **Promote Your Event:**
 - Use social media, campus bulletin boards, and local news outlets.
 - Emphasize the mental health focus to attract interested attendees.
7. **During the Event:**
 - Have a moderator to keep things on track.
 - Ensure equal speaking opportunities on all major issues for all candidates.
 - Record the event (with permission) to share with those who couldn't attend.

Remember: Even a small event can make a big impact in local politics!

For more detailed guidance, check out:

- [League of Women Voters' Tips for Candidate Forums](#)

Use Your Voice on Social Media

Use your online powers for good! Share accurate voting info, post about why mental health matters in this election, and challenge your followers to register to vote. Create a series of Instagram stories breaking down mental health policies. Don't forget to use trending hashtags, audio, and/or filters!

Social media is a powerful platform to express why voting with mental health in mind matters in the 2024 elections.

Here are some ideas to help elevate and promote messaging, focusing on engaging and mobilizing youth and young adults and the mental health community:

Visual Campaigns: Create shareable graphics with key statistics about mental health and voting rights, paired with compelling messaging urging action. Feel free to use the design included in this guide.

Personal Stories: Feature personal stories from individuals within the mental health community about how voting impacts their lives. Use stories as testimonials on social media to humanize the issues.

Blog: Write a blog post to educate your sphere of influence about how the upcoming election impacts your mental health personally or our nation.

Campaign Updates: Regularly update your followers on campaign events, voter registration deadlines, and key legislative developments related to mental health.

Interactive Polls: Conduct polls on social media to gauge your audience's views on mental health policies and voting intentions. Share results and encourage discussions.

Calls to Action: Use social media to issue calls to action, such as registering to vote, attending candidate forums, or participating in advocacy days for mental health.



Educational Content: Share educational content about the voting process, including how-to guides for first-time voters, debunking myths about voting rights, and explaining ballot measures.

Hashtag Campaigns: Influence those in your social media network to take action by sharing this guide on all of your platforms. Encourage followers to use hashtag #VoteLikeYourMentalHealthDependsOnIt.

Influencer Collaboration: Partner with influential voices in the mental health space (Active Minds Speakers) to amplify your message and reach a wider audience of advocates and supporters.

Cross-Platform Strategies:

- Adapt your content for different platforms (e.g., long-form on YouTube, quick hits on TikTok).
- Use tools like Linktree in your bio to connect followers to voting resources.
- Coordinate posting times across platforms for maximum reach.

Ethical Considerations:

- Respect privacy and obtain consent before sharing others' stories.
- Clearly distinguish between personal opinions and factual information.
- Be mindful of potential triggers and include content warnings when necessary.
- Encourage healthy debate but moderate comments to maintain a safe space.



IMPORTANT: Understanding and Navigating Personal and Professional Boundaries

When engaging in political discussions or advocacy online:

For many of us in advocacy, election season is an important and exciting opportunity to draw attention to the issues we care about and to demand action. When it comes to elections and politics, there are some additional things to keep in mind, especially if you work in the nonprofit sector.

- **Use Personal Accounts Only:**
 - Always post from your personal social media accounts, never from work accounts.
 - Do not use work email addresses for political communications.
- **Clear Disclaimer: Make sure to clarify when you are speaking for yourself vs. on behalf of an organization**
 - Include a clear statement on your personal profiles: "Views and opinions expressed are my own and do not represent those of my employer or any organization I'm affiliated with."
- **Be Mindful of Your Role: Be mindful of whether or not people will think you are speaking or making an endorsement on behalf of an organization**
 - If you're in a leadership position, especially in a non-profit, be extra cautious about endorsing specific candidates.
 - Your personal endorsements might be misconstrued as organizational endorsements.
- **Know Your Organization's Policies: Identify your organization's policies on social media and political activity**
 - Familiarize yourself with your employer's social media and political activity policies.
 - Some organizations have strict rules about employees' political activities, even on personal time.
- **501(c)(3) Organizations and Leaders: Use extra caution when you are working for or leading a 501(c)(3) organization**
 - If you work for or lead a 501(c)(3) non-profit, remember that these organizations are prohibited from endorsing or opposing political candidates.
 - As a leader, your personal endorsements could jeopardize your organization's tax-exempt status.

- **Separate personal and professional roles when engaging in political activities**
 - Avoid discussing work or using your professional title when engaging in political activities.
 - Be clear that you're speaking as a private citizen, not as a representative of any organization.
- **Understand the reach and potential impact of your posts**
 - The issues at hand can be life-changing, even life-saving. Your online presence can make a difference in the present and future of public policy and your personal life. As you share what is important to you, you may also want to consider how your words might be seen or interpreted by others online and the impact they may have after the election is over.
 - Once something is online, it can be difficult to truly delete.

Remember: You have a right to political expression in your personal life. Professionally, there are standards and boundaries often required, especially in the nonprofit sector where an organization's tax-exempt status can be at risk or in instances where it may look like you're speaking on behalf of an organization or community. When in doubt, err on the side of caution by taking the steps listed above or consult with your HR department or organizational leadership.



Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are commonly read by policymakers, legislators, and engaged community members. The most effective letters are no more than 250 words, to the point, well-supported, and, most importantly, from the heart. Below are some tips for writing an effective letter. Use the topics in the “Questions for candidates” section for examples of original talking points you can use in your own statement. If your letter gets accepted, let us know by emailing info@mentalhealthamerica.org; communications@activeminds.org.

Where to submit : Start by determining where to submit – such as your town/city, regional, or state newspaper. You can usually find an email address or online form to submit your letter to the opinion or editorial section. Call the newspaper if you can't find where to submit online or want to mail a paper letter (although electronic submissions are usually preferred).

Check the requirements : Determine the newspaper's submission guidelines, as there may be word limits. Always include your first and last name, address, email, and phone number. Newspapers will often contact you back to confirm that you want your comments published. Note: Your address, email, and/or phone number will never be published or printed.

Make your point: Feel free to use the talking points included in this guide, but tailor them to the audience and community. Here are some other tips:

- If you have personal involvement, experience, or expertise specific to the issue you are writing about, mention it to make your points.
- Use short sentences to make sure your argument is clear.
- The most impactful letters stay on topic and focus on just a few points.

Follow up: Newspapers receive many letters, so don't be disappointed if your letter is not published. You can also follow up with the editor to ensure they received it and get a sense of whether they may use it. If the editor indicates that it will not run, ask why, as it may just need some reworking. You can also try submitting the letter to another newspaper.

Letter Example:



As a young adult, I'm deeply concerned about the state of mental health care access for my generation. While federal law requires health plans to cover mental health services equally to physical health care, many of us still struggle to get the help we need. Why? Because some states aren't enforcing these parity laws, leaving young people without essential mental health support during crucial years of our lives.

[Optional: include a short personal story/anecdote or issue in the community impacted by the topic.]

Did you know that about 50% of mental health conditions begin by age 14, and 75% by age 24? That's why it's crucial for young people to have easy access to mental health care. We're not just talking about our health today – we're talking about our futures.

As young voters, we have the power to change this. We need to support candidates who commit to enforcing mental health parity laws. By doing so, we're not just saving lives – we're investing in the mental well-being of an entire generation.

It's time for our voices to be heard. Let's vote for a future where mental health care is a right, not a privilege.

Your Name

City, State

Support and Empower Other Voters

Be an advocate for voting, but remember to approach the topic with sensitivity and understanding. Here's how you can help:

- **Know the facts:** Familiarize yourself with voting eligibility requirements in your area.
- **Be inclusive and respectful:** Recognize that voting can be a personal matter.
- **Combat voting apathy:** For those who can vote but feel their vote doesn't matter, share information about close elections or local races where every vote really counts.
- **Address mental health barriers:** Some individuals with mental health challenges might feel overwhelmed by the voting process. Offer support by helping them find accurate voting information or accompanying them to register or vote, if they're comfortable with that.
- **Break down practical barriers:** Offer assistance with tasks like finding transportation to polling places or researching candidates and ballot measures.
- **Encourage civic engagement for all:** Even for those who can't vote, there are many ways to be involved in the democratic process.

Remember: Your goal is to support and empower, not pressure. Every person's situation is unique, and your understanding and assistance can make a real difference in fostering civic engagement, whether through voting or other means.



Mental Health Advocacy Checklist



Hey young changemakers! It's time to flex those advocacy muscles and make sure mental health is front and center in the 2024 elections. Here's your action plan to rock the vote and amplify mental health awareness:

Register to Vote (or Help Others Register)

Did you know? According to the US Census Bureau in 2022, only 69% of eligible voters were registered. Let's pump those numbers up!

Not registered? Get on it right now – it's super easy and quick:

It truly takes just 5 minutes to register online, so do it before you forget!

- **Election Protection**
- **Project Vote Smart**
- **Rock the Vote**
- **Vote411.org**

Get to know the Candidates

To get to know the candidates on your ballot:

- Start with [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org): Enter your address to see a personalized ballot
- Use [Ballotpedia's Sample Ballot Lookup tool](#): Enter your address to see which candidates will be on your ballot
- For each candidate: Look for their official campaign website
- Visit your state's Secretary of State or Board of Elections website: Look for a list of certified candidates
- For local candidates: Check your county or city election office website
- Use fact-checking resources: Sites like [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org), [PolitiFact](https://www.politifact.com), or [OpenSecrets](https://www.opensecrets.org) for campaign finance information
- Be cautious of unofficial sources or unverified social media accounts

Remember: Information availability may vary, especially for local races. If you can't find information online, consider attending local candidate forums or reaching out to campaigns directly.

By following these steps, you can research candidates for all offices on your ballot, from local positions to federal offices.

- Focus on their mental health and healthcare stances
- Bonus: Look into their views on social issues that impact mental health

Speak Up at Town Halls and Local Events

Make your voice heard by participating in town halls and local candidate events. Here's how to make an impact:

- **Find Events:** Check local news, candidate websites, and social media for upcoming town halls or meet-and-greets.
- **Prepare Your Question:** Focus on a specific mental health issue. For example:
 - "What's your plan to improve mental health services in our schools?"
 - "How will you address the shortage of mental health professionals in our community?"
- **Practice:** Rehearse your question to build confidence.
- **Arrive Early:** This increases your chances of being called on.
- **Follow Up:** If you don't get to ask your question, approach the candidate afterwards or send a follow-up email.
- **Need Help?** Active Minds and Mental Health America (MHA) are here to support you:
 - Use MHA's Advocacy Network resources for guidance on legislative advocacy: [Advocacy Network | Mental Health America](#)
 - Check out RESULTS' guide on asking questions at town hall meetings: [Ask a question at a town hall meeting - RESULTS](#)

Success Story: Last year, Active Minds chapters in Colorado organized a mental health forum with state legislative candidates. Over 100 students attended, leading to mental health becoming a key issue in local campaigns.

Remember: Your question could be the one that puts mental health on the candidate's agenda!

For support or to share your plans, contact Active Minds at programs@activeminds.org or MHA at info@mhanational.org.

Host a Local Candidate Q&A

Want to make mental health a key issue in your community? Consider hosting a Q&A session with local candidates! Here's how:

1. **Start Small:**

- Focus on local races like city council, school board, or state representatives. These candidates are often more accessible and eager to engage with voters.

2. **Team Up:**

- Partner with campus groups or community organizations. This can help with logistics and boost attendance.

3. **Plan Ahead:**

- Give yourself at least a month to organize.
- Choose a neutral, accessible venue.
- Decide on a format (e.g., moderated panel, town hall style).

4. **Invite Candidates:**

- Invite all qualified candidates for a given office.
- Reach out early and be flexible with dates.
- Provide clear information about the event's purpose and format.

5. **Prepare Questions:**

- Focus on local mental health issues and policies.
- Mix prepared questions with audience submissions.
- Ensure that questions are fair, impartial, and open-ended, rather than focused on any specific candidate's positions or accomplishments.

6. **Promote Your Event:**

- Use social media, campus bulletin boards, and local news outlets.
- Emphasize the mental health focus to attract interested attendees.

7. **During the Event:**

- Have a moderator to keep things on track.
- Ensure equal speaking opportunities on all issues for all candidates.
- Record the event (with permission) to share with those who couldn't attend.

Remember: Even a small event can make a big impact in local politics!

Speak Up: Your Voice, Amplified

Got something to say? Make it heard! Write a letter to your local paper (keep it under 250 words and pack it with facts). Or go digital – hop on a podcast or start your own TikTok series about mental health and voting. Remember, authenticity is key. Use the tips in this guide to craft your message.

□ **Make Your Voice Heard: Contact the Candidates**

Yes, you can actually reach out to political candidates, and it matters more than you might think! Here's why and how:

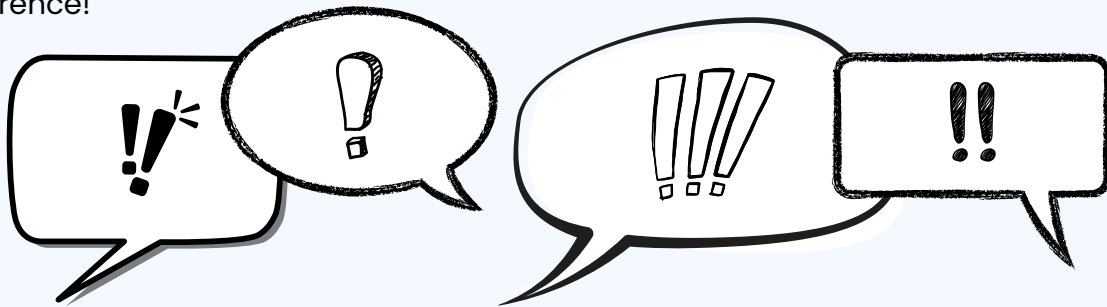
- **They're listening:** Candidates and their teams actively track communications from constituents. Your message contributes to the data they use to shape their priorities.
- **Numbers matter:** The more people who speak up about mental health, the more likely it is to become a priority issue for candidates.
- **You represent a key demographic:** As a young voter, your opinion carries extra weight. Candidates are eager to understand and address the concerns of your generation.

How to reach out:

1. Find the candidate's official website. Most have a 'Contact' or 'Get Involved' section.
2. Use their contact form or email address to send your message.
3. Keep it brief, personal, and focused on mental health issues that matter to you.
4. Ask a specific question about their stance on mental health policies.

Sample message: "As a young voter in [your area], mental health is a top priority for me. What specific policies do you support to improve mental health care access and affordability for young adults? I look forward to your response and how it will inform my vote."

Remember: Every message counts. Your voice, combined with others, can shift the conversation and influence policy decisions. Don't underestimate your power to make a difference!



□ **Craft Your Voting Game Plan**

Voting day is your chance to make your voice heard! Here's how to create a solid game plan:

1. **Know Your Polling Place:**

- a. Find your assigned location at [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) or your state's election website.
- b. Plan your route: Will you drive, walk, or take public transport?

2. **Check Required Documents:**

- a. Most states require some form of ID. Check your state's specific requirements at [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov)'s voter registration page.
- b. Bring a backup form of ID just in case.

3. **Time It Right:**

- a. Check your polling place's hours of operation on your state election website.
- b. Consider early voting to avoid crowds. Check early voting dates on your state's election site.
- c. If voting on Election Day, plan around your work/class schedule.

4. **Be Prepared for a Wait:**

- a. Wear comfortable shoes.
- b. Bring water, snacks, and any necessary medications.
- c. Pack a portable charger and headphones for entertainment.

5. **Vote by Mail Option:**

- a. Request your ballot early if choosing this option. Visit the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's website for state-specific information.
- b. Set a reminder to return your ballot well before the deadline.

6. **Bring a Buddy:**

- a. Invite a friend to vote with you – it's more fun and you can keep each other motivated!

Remember: Being prepared makes voting easier and more enjoyable. You've got this!

Pro Tip: Create a voting playlist to get pumped up, and scout out the perfect spot for your "I Voted" selfie to celebrate your civic engagement!

□ **Start the Convo: Mental Health Matters**

Get your friends fired up about mental health and voting! Host a debate watch party, start a group chat about the issues, or create a TikTok challenge. Share why you think mental health should be a top priority for candidates. Here are some conversation starters to get the ball rolling:

- "What mental health issues do you think are most important for our generation?"
- "How do you think the candidates' policies might affect our mental health?"
- "If you could ask the candidates one question about mental health, what would it be?"
- "What changes would you like to see in mental health care in our community?"
- "How do you think voting can impact mental health services and policies?"

Remember to listen to others too - you might learn something new! These conversations can help everyone understand different perspectives and the importance of voting on mental health issues.

□ **Be a Social Media Influencer**

Use your online powers for good! Share accurate voting info, post about why mental health matters in this election, and challenge your followers to register to vote. Create a series of Instagram stories breaking down mental health policies. Don't forget to use trending hashtags, trending audio and/or filters!



□ Support and Empower Voters

Be an advocate for voting, but remember to approach the topic with sensitivity and understanding. Here's how you can help:

1. **Know the facts:** Familiarize yourself with voting eligibility requirements in your area. Remember, these can vary based on factors like citizenship status, age, and criminal record.
2. **Be inclusive and respectful:** Recognize that voting eligibility is a personal matter. Some people may not be able to vote due to various reasons, which they might not want to discuss openly.
3. **Combat voting apathy:** For those who can vote but feel their vote doesn't matter, share information about close elections or local races where every vote truly counts.
4. **Address mental health barriers:** Some individuals with mental health challenges might feel overwhelmed by the voting process. Offer support by:
 - a. Helping them find accurate voting information
 - b. Accompanying them to register or vote, if they're comfortable with that
 - c. Reminding them that mental health conditions don't disqualify them from voting
5. **Break down practical barriers:** Offer assistance with tasks like:
 - a. Finding transportation to polling places
 - b. Researching candidates and ballot measures
 - c. Understanding the voting process
6. **Encourage civic engagement for all:** Even for those who can't vote, there are many ways to be involved in the democratic process, such as:
 - a. Volunteering for campaigns or civic organizations
 - b. Participating in community discussions
 - c. Encouraging eligible friends and family to vote

Remember: Your goal is to support and empower, not pressure. Every person's situation is unique, and your understanding and assistance can make a real difference in fostering civic engagement, whether through voting or other means.

□ **Stay Informed and Active Year-Round**

Mental health policy isn't just an election issue—it's an ongoing conversation that needs your voice. Here's how to stay involved and make a difference throughout the year:

- **Join Advocacy Networks:**
 - Sign up for [MHA's Advocacy Network](#) to receive action alerts and participate in advocacy campaigns.
 - Subscribe to the [Active Minds Newsletter](#) for updates on mental health initiatives and opportunities for involvement.
- **Engage with Elected Officials:**
 - Regularly communicate with your representatives about mental health issues.
 - Share why specific policies matter to you, your community, and mental health in general.
 - Remember, as a constituent, your voice carries weight!
- **Stay Informed on Current Issues:**
 - Follow reliable news sources and mental health organizations for updates on policy developments.
 - Pay attention to local and state-level initiatives, not just federal policies.
- **Take Action on Urgent Matters:**
 - Respond to calls for action from mental health organizations.
 - Write letters, make phone calls, or attend town halls to voice your concerns on pressing issues.
- **Educate and Mobilize Others:**
 - Share what you learn with friends and family.
 - Encourage others to get involved in mental health advocacy.
- **Participate in Year-Round Civic Activities:**
 - Attend city council meetings or other local government sessions.
 - Volunteer for mental health organizations or advocacy groups.

Remember: Policy change is an ongoing process. Your consistent engagement can help shape mental health policies and funding decisions throughout the year. Every email, call, or letter can contribute to creating positive change in mental health care and support.

Self-Care During Election Season



Balancing Civic Engagement and Mental Health: A Marathon, Not a Sprint

Remember, social change is a long-term process, so it's crucial to prioritize your mental health while staying engaged. Connect with like-minded communities to share experiences and maintain motivation. Integrate self-care into your advocacy work, such as organizing group meditations before meeting. Set boundaries on news consumption and diversify your activities to prevent burnout. Build relationships with fellow advocates who understand the emotional journey, and don't hesitate to lean on your support system when needed. Practice self-compassion, acknowledging that feeling frustrated at times is normal. If you're feeling overwhelmed, consider seeking professional support. By taking care of your mental health, you're ensuring you can contribute effectively to long-term change and inspire others in your community.

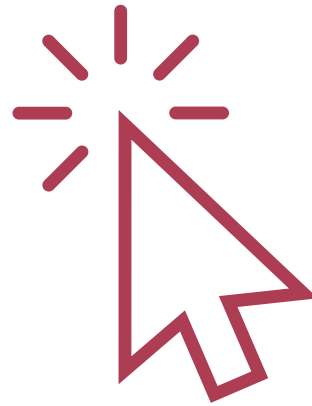
- **Set healthy boundaries:** It's okay to limit your exposure to news and social media. Consider muting or unfollowing accounts that increase your stress.
- **Create a comfort space:** Identify activities that help you feel calm and make time for them regularly.
- **Connect with support systems:** Reach out to trusted friends or family members to share your feelings and experiences.
- **Move your body:** Physical activity can help manage stress. Find movement that feels good for you, whether it's a walk, stretching, or dancing.
- **Manage information intake:** Choose specific times to check news from reliable sources to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Explore relaxation techniques like deep breathing or guided imagery to help stay present.
- **Engage in meaningful activities:** Volunteering or helping others can provide a sense of purpose and connection.
- **Seek professional support:** If you're struggling, it's always okay to reach out to a mental health professional for additional support.
- **Acknowledge progress:** Recognize and appreciate the positive changes you're contributing to, no matter how small they may seem.

- **Maintain perspective:** Remember that intense political periods are temporary, but your well-being is always important.
- **Use music as a tool:** Create a playlist of songs that uplift your mood or help you feel calm.
- **Practice self-compassion:** Be kind to yourself. It's okay to step back when you need to, and you don't have to engage in every political discussion.

Remember: Taking care of your mental health is a vital part of being an engaged citizen. It's okay to prioritize your well-being alongside your civic engagement. Stay informed, stay involved, but most importantly, be gentle with yourself during this time.



Additional Resources



Voter Information Websites

Local and state candidates

- **Vote Smart**: Enter your ZIP code or address to be directed to information on the candidates that will be on your ballot.
- **Sample Ballot Lookup - Ballotpedia**: Enter your address to see a sample ballot.
 - Note: This sample ballot tool includes: All candidates in every upcoming election occurring within the 100 most-populated cities in the U.S., plus all federal, statewide, and territorial elections, including ballot measures, nationwide.

Major Party Platforms

- **Party Platform - Democrats**
- **Party Platform - Republicans**

Voter registration information

- **Election Protection**
- **Rock the Vote**
- **VOTE411**
- **Vote.org**

Voting Rights

- **Fair Elections Center**
- **Voting Rules By State**
- **Know Your Rights | Voting Rights | ACLU**



Mental Health Support Services

Months-long campaign rhetoric, in addition to passionate voices for and against candidates, can be overwhelming. While Mental Health America encourages voting and learning about the issues, it is also important that individuals take care of their well-being and check in with themselves often - especially amid other concurrent world events. Consider taking an MHA screening ([Take a Mental Health Test](#)) or using these resources:

- [**How To Cope With Election Stress - Crisis Text Line**](#)
- [**Negative News Coverage and Mental Health**](#)
- [**How Can I Be Okay When the World Is Terrible**](#)
- [**Taking Good Care of Yourself**](#)
- [**Helpful vs. Harmful Ways To Cope With Emotions**](#)
- [**I'm Feeling Too Much at Once: Dealing with Emotional Overload**](#)
- [**Social Media and Mental Health**](#)
- [**The Do's of Social Media**](#)
- [**Mental Health During Global Conflict**](#)
- [**I'm Angry About the Injustices I See Around Me**](#)

For more information and resources, visit:

- [**Mental Health America**](#)
- [**Active Minds**](#)



Contact Us



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