May is Mental Health Awareness Month



May is a time to pause, connect, and remind one another that mental health is essential to total health — and that no one has to navigate challenges alone.

Mental Health Awareness Month was created to reduce stigma, build understanding, and encourage people to seek support. Those goals remain as important as ever. In recent years, national and local leaders have elevated one clear message: **connection matters**.

Recent national research continues to underscore the powerful link between loneliness and mental health. A large 2026 study published in *JAMA Network Open* found that loneliness can intensify symptoms of depression and anxiety — and that strengthening social connections may help reduce the risk of more serious mental-health outcomes. In San Mateo County, leaders acted early on this evidence, becoming the first county in the nation to declare loneliness a public health emergency. That work continues today, with ongoing county-led initiatives focused on strengthening connection, belonging, and well-being for residents of all ages.

Strong, supportive relationships play a powerful role in protecting mental health. While reaching out can feel uncomfortable at times, small, intentional steps can make a meaningful difference.

Simple ways to connect:

- **Reach out**: Call a friend you haven't spoken to in a while.
- **Take the lead**: Invite someone to lunch or start a walking or interest group.
- **Get involved**: Volunteer, join a class, or participate in community activities.
- **Ask for help**: If loneliness feels overwhelming or concerns are more serious, professional support can help.

For Kaiser Permanente members, **no referral is needed** to connect with mental health resources, and intake phone counselors and our Emergency Departments are available 24 hours a day. We provide individual therapy, group therapy, health classes, and medication if needed. In addition, emotional wellness apps are available to KP members at no extra cost.

Let's check in with ourselves and each other. Building connections builds overall health.

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