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## Mental health walk event

**SEASIDE PARK** — There's a picture some people have in mind when they think of mental illness.

But what many of them don't realize is how prevalent mental illness is or what support opportunities are available to individuals facing a mental illness and the families who care for them, said Michael Roche, vice president and board member of the Ocean County chapter of National Alliance on Mental Illness.

NAMI New Jersey is driven to change that view, he said. On Saturday, the organization's state and Ocean County affiliates are hosting the Step Forward for Our Heroes walk on the boardwalk in Seaside Park.

It is the first of what Mike Jones, president of the Ocean County affiliate, hopes is an annual NAMI New Jersey walk. Previously, the walks have been more sporadic, he said.

With its theme, the walk is meant to specially recognize veterans who suffer from mental illness, though the overall goal is to raise awareness about mental illness to help end change the public's view of the disease and educate those with mental illness how to get help, Roche said.

"Awareness takes the mystery out of the

disease and allows people to go for treatment," he said. "That, for us, would be a great pay off."

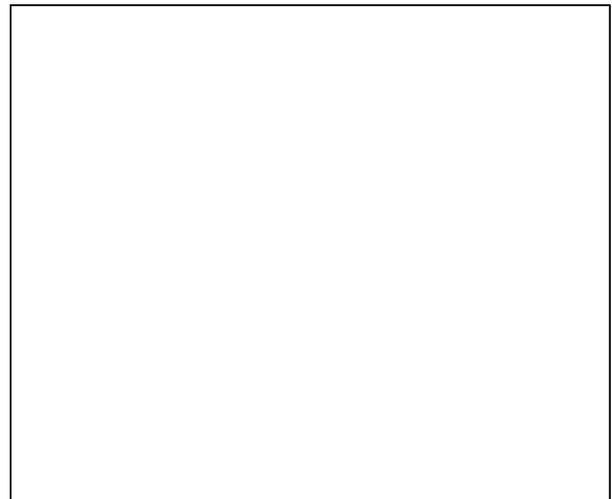
About one in four adults and one in 10 children have a mental illness, Aruna Rao, associate director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New Jersey, said. In New Jersey, 259,000 adults and 93,000 children were living with serious mental health conditions in 2010, she said, citing the latest data available.

What's tragic, Rao said, is less than one-third of people with a mental illness seek treatment, meaning two-thirds of people who need help aren't finding it and may not even be looking.

Roche said he has spoken with individuals, including veterans returning from war, who have kept their mental illness secret for fear of a lost promotion, position or even being shunned by friends.

The general public, largely due to the perception created in movies, tend to fear

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people with mental illness, when really they pose more of a threat to themselves until they get treatment, he said.

With medicine and therapy, treatment is an option if that person in need knows where to go, he said.

“My wife and I were at wit’s end because when you first experience the problems associated with mental illness, you really don’t know where to turn for treatment,” said Don Seckler, a member and co-vice president with Roche for the Ocean County affiliate.

NAMI New Jersey offers 12-week class to help caregivers of people with a mental illness better understand the issues their loved one is facing, Roche said. The Ocean County affiliate hosts monthly meetings open to its roughly 160 members with speakers and various supports to help others, he said.

## IF YOU GO

Step Forward for Our Heroes is Saturday on the Seaside Park boardwalk. Donations are welcome. A family fun day is planned after the walk for participants. For more information, contact Aruna Rao at 732-940-0991, or [info@naminj.org](mailto:info@naminj.org).

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