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# Extravaganza promoting mental health held in Montgomery

*Published: Saturday, July 29th 2017, 5:40 pm CDT*

*Updated: Saturday, July 29th 2017, 5:41 pm CDT*

By Samantha Day [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - The Council on Substance Abuse-NCADD hosted a National Minority Mental Health Awareness Extravaganza in an attempt to raise awareness on the link between substance abuse and mental health disorders.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly 25 percent of all U.S. adults have a mental illness, and often times, those suffering are self-medicating.

"Somebody introduced me to something that would make me feel better, while I tried to figure out what it was, but I never did," said Montgomery resident Pearl Parlow.

In a 2014 survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 7.9 million people had both a mental and substance use disorder.

"Certain medications that individuals are getting their hands on, in terms of abusing opioids, they definitely have a direct link to mental illness because they can have some side effects," said program director Kwatasian Hunt.

Parlow was one of them.

"I was addicted to crack cocaine for over 21 years," said Parlow.

As the state combats the rising opioid epidemic, Pediatrician Albert Holloway said it's important to remember the brain can also get sick.

"The brain can get sick, just as our arthritis can bother us as well," Holloway said. "It's an illness just like all the other illnesses that we have and there can be ways that we can manage it, although we need to understand it's a chronic disease so a lot of times it may not go away. So it's a continuous process."

He continued on by saying that mental illnesses are more prevalent in impoverished areas.

"It's more prevalent in communities that have a higher percentage of poverty because their childhood experiences are more difficult. We know that poverty changes the way the brain is made. Those who have an income of less than \$25,000 a year, their children have about a 6 percent less gray matter in the frontal area," said Holloway.

If you, or anyone you know is suffering from substance abuse or a mental illness, you can contact the Council on Substance Abuse-NCADD at (334) 262-1629 or you can visit their [website](#).

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