USING PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE WHEN REFERRING TO INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS AND CONDITIONS

Examples of Person First Language	
Say:	**Instead of:**
He/She <u>has</u> bipolar illness (or a diagnosis of...)	He/She <u>is</u> bipolar
He/She <u>has</u> schizophrenia (or a diagnosis of...)	He/She <u>is</u> schizophrenic
He/She <u>has</u> a mental health condition	
He/She <u>has</u> a mental illness	He/She <u>is</u> emotionally disturbed/mentally ill
	He/She <u>is</u> mentally ill
Person (singular) with a mental illness (singular);	
Persons/people/individuals (plural) with mental illness<u>es</u> (plural)	The mentally ill... OR People with mental illness (singular)

General Rules By Which to Speak, Write, Respect and Empower	
Having vs. Being	To HAVE an illness, or to have the diagnosis of an illness, is notably different than to BE the illness. When I "have bipolar illness," I recognize that aspect of myself, much as I recognize that I "have brown eyes." When I "am bipolar," I take on the identity of BEING bipolar. It becomes me, and I become it. When we talk about an individual as separate from their mental health condition, we recognize the person first, and we acknowledge the person's power to overcome that condition and live a full life separate from it. I often tell people, "I may have it, but it doesn't have me!"
Singular vs. Plural	Mental illnesses are diverse; there are many of them, and many types of them. To say that "people" (plural) have "mental illness" (singular), misses the breadth and diversity of the nature of mental illnesses. Therefore, one person has one illness ("person with a mental illness"). More than one person has more than one illness ("persons with mental illnesses"). To use the singular (illness) when speaking in the plural (people/individuals/persons) reinforces stigma and discrimination. It implies that the there is only one mental illness, that it is "one size fits all."

Nanette.Larson@illinois.gov