



UMass Mind Network

Newsletter

March 2026

Individuals with schizophrenia often face triple jeopardy: a devastating mental illness, co-morbid medical problems, and co-occurring substance use. UMass Mind Clinical and Research Program, part of the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School and UMass Memorial Health, aims to address each facet of the triple jeopardy and develop innovative intervention strategies to promote whole person health. The UMass Mind Network aims to create a community space to share knowledge and resources regarding psychosis, schizophrenia, and serious mental illnesses.

Weighing the Cardiometabolic Risks in Patients with Serious Mental Illness

People with serious mental illness (SMI), including schizophrenia spectrum disorders, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder, are at a much higher risk for developing cardiometabolic problems such as obesity, diabetes, elevated levels of bad cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease than in the general population, leading to 10-15 years shortened lifespan in this patient population.

UMass Mind has developed a community-based Weighing the Cardiometabolic Risks education and screening program in patients with SMI. The program provides health screenings using portable, point-of-care devices, such as a body composition analyzer to measure fat distribution and a lipid analyzer to measure cholesterol levels. An estimated 10-year Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease (ASCVD) Risk is then calculated based on the measures. After the screenings, participants receive one-on-one counseling to learn about their cardiometabolic risks, and individualized resources to promote their health and recovery journey.

By hosting Weighing the Risks events at local community settings where people with SMI live, receive care, work, and socialize, the program aims to address social determinants of health such as lack of transportation and access to health care, and empower participants to make safer, healthier lifestyle choices.

On January 20th, 2026, UMass Mind hosted our second Weighing the Risks event in collaboration with Community Healthlink's (CHL) Adult Counseling Center. Throughout the day, patients who attended their regular outpatient appointments stopped by the Weighing the Risks station, a designated private space, and participated in the event.

The event was well received by patient participants! One participant said that they "learned some important things about my health

signs that is super helpful, such as my cholesterol levels,” while another participant said that they would “continue to exercise and eat healthy foods in my daily life.” The event was also a valuable learning experience for the UMass medical students involved. Nika Rosa, a UMass medical student who took a gap year working with UMass Mind, commented that it was a “great opportunity to see how the program works in different settings.” Dr. Sarah Langenfeld, medical director of CHL’s Community Behavioral Health Center, said “we appreciate [UMass Mind] being here and supporting the health and engagement of our patients.”



Danielle Li, a fourth-year UMass medical student, pictured above with a patient participant!

We greatly appreciate the support of Dr. Langenfeld and Stephanie Guinn-Burns, director of the CHL Adult Counseling Center, in making this event possible. We are excited to continue running this program at more community locations in the future.

Sprouting Our Pilot Gardening Program at Genesis Club

How can mental health recovery be supported through gardening? UMass Mind recently launched a pilot gardening program in collaboration with Genesis Clubhouse in Worcester, MA. UMass Mind members Joe Ricca, Lawrence Mendez, and Nika Rosa helped lead six weekly sessions to empower people with serious mental illness (SMI) to develop small, impactful lifestyle habits. The program draws on principles from ecotherapy, or nature therapy, with previous research demonstrating its potential to positively improve well-being and social functioning in individuals living with SMI. This novel program was also adapted to fit Genesis Club’s model of rehabilitation to help people with mental illness achieve their full potential through opportunities for employment, education, wellness, and housing.

Each session included an interactive educational presentation on a variety of topics ranging from garden-to-table practices to mindfulness, followed by hands-on gardening-related activities. Members enjoyed sprouting their own plants like sage and lavender, engaging in reflective journaling, creating tea bags, and even building their own terrariums. They were highly engaged and enthusiastic, frequently sharing their own gardening knowledge and experience with each other during sessions. The participants viewed the program as “authentic, relatable, and knowledgeable,” and shared their appreciation for the interactive sessions and community building.



Pictured above, some of our participants enjoying hands-on gardening activities to improve wellness!

We are grateful to our partners at Genesis Club and to our medical trainees who helped make this pilot program a success! We are also proud to partner with 2Gether We Eat, a community-based hydroponic farming organization who provided a demonstration on hydroponic systems and even donated a system to Genesis!

We hope to continue our tradition of collaborating with community partners as we adapt the curriculum and work toward developing a broader lifestyle-focused wellness initiative.

Learn more about UMass Mind's Community Intervention Program here!

Ongoing Study Open to Patient Recruitment



Clozapine is associated with significant metabolic side effects such as weight gain, obesity, diabetes, and elevated levels of bad cholesterol. The goal of this study is to determine if taking lumateperone (Caplyta©) might improve physical health in individuals treated with clozapine (Clozaril®).

The study is currently **open to recruitment** and is looking for patients who are on clozapine treatment and diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder.

[Click here for the study brochure](#)

For more information about this study, please contact us at 508-856-Mind (6463) or mind@umassmed.edu.

If you're interested in collaborating with us, bringing our community programs to your agency or organizations, or referring a patient to participate in our ongoing studies, please reach out to us at mind@umassmed.edu (email) or 508-856-Mind (6463) (phone).



UMass Mind Clinical and Research Program

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