

Mental Health

A Comprehensive Approach

The importance of mental health has historically been undervalued due to a variety of factors including stigmatization, lack of awareness, and subpar investment. Confronting this problem demands a comprehensive approach that tackles the multi-faceted challenges we face. Beyond improving the lives of millions of people, taking substantive action will address a range of vexing societal problems including domestic abuse, population disparities, and the drug epidemic.

A Few Key Considerations

- ✓ Insurers often treat mental health conditions differently than physical health conditions which leads to inadequate care, poor outcomes, and the perpetuation of societal problems.
- ✓ About 1 in 5 American adults have a mental health condition.¹
- ✓ Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affects approximately 9 million Americans with women significantly more likely to experience it than men.²

State Actions to Address Mental Health

- ✓ **Establish mental health parity.** By implementing parity laws, mental health must be covered on par with physical health. For example, if a plan provides unlimited doctor visits for a physical condition like diabetes, then it must also offer unlimited visits for a mental condition like schizophrenia.
- ✓ **Address the provider shortage.** One of the most persistent problems in fostering better outcomes is the sheer shortage of mental health providers. To address this, lawmakers can incentivize this work by forgiving student loan debt for mental health professionals working underserved areas.
- ✓ **Ensure patient access.** People with mental health disorders rely on complex therapies. Medicaid should not require step-therapy on medications indicated for schizophrenia if the individual has already gone through a prior authorization process or was dispensed that medicine in the past 12 months.
- ✓ **Invest in mental health.** Increasing funding for core mental health services will do a long way towards addressing basic access issues. Such funding can increase the number of mental health crisis stabilization beds, mobile crisis responder units, and outpatient treatment programs.
- ✓ **Enable advance directives.** Enabling individuals to have advance directives specific to their mental health needs is especially important for people who are placed in a psychiatric hold or are sent to a facility that does not have a medical history of them.
- ✓ **Advance co-responder legislation.** This concept creates co-responder teams of peace officers and mental health professionals to respond to 911 calls when someone may be in a mental health crisis. The goal is to assess these individuals and attempt to stabilize them in a behavioral health setting rather than in jail.

¹ National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Mental Health by the Numbers. (February 2022). [https://www.nami.org/mhstats#:~:text=aged%2010%2D34-You%20Are%20Not%20Alone,2020%20\(14.2%20million%20people\)](https://www.nami.org/mhstats#:~:text=aged%2010%2D34-You%20Are%20Not%20Alone,2020%20(14.2%20million%20people)) Retrieved May 16, 2022.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (October 2021). Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt35325/NSDUHFFR1PDFW102121.pdf>. Retrieved May 16, 2022.