



FOR DECADES, this country has underfunded and undervalued mental health and substance use care with devastating results. Today, only 43 percent of all people living with mental illness receive treatment for their condition — although the numbers go up to 67 percent for serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression, unacceptable gaps in access remain. And only 12 percent of Americans with a substance use disorder receive specialty treatment in any given year.

Yet, in the midst of this crisis, Americans are seeking mental health and substance use services more than ever before. People understand that prevention works, treatment is effective and recovery is possible. The stigma is fading. But unfortunately, lack of access to timely, high-quality treatment has replaced stigma as the most significant barrier to a healthier America. The National Council for Behavioral Health is fighting to change that — to build a nation that recognizes the essential truth: **Without mental health, there is no health. Without access to addiction treatment, recovery will be out of reach for many.**

On October 31, 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Community Mental Health Act, which drastically altered the delivery of mental health services and inspired a new era of optimism in mental health care. More than 50 years later, the nation must once again embrace a bold agenda of change. **Unite for Behavioral Health** is a new initiative that will leverage the National Council's track record of success, along with the passion and expertise of our more than 3,326 member organizations to lead the nation towards a future that values the whole health of every American.

THE UNITE FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN seeks to achieve five essential objectives that, together, represent the greatest opportunity to improve the health and well-being of the entire nation. The time is now and we are ready to make a real and lasting difference.

1 CHANGE THE MODEL: CCBHCs IN ALL 50 STATES

Our country faces an access challenge that is the direct result of decades of under investment in "safety-net" services. Today, community behavioral health organizations simply do not have the resources to meet the needs in their communities. We set out to change that. Working with our champions in Congress, we helped get the Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Act enacted in 2014. It created national standards and sustainable funding for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). Today, hundreds of organizations are leading a bold shift to integrate physical and mental health care, address social determinants of health, provide 24/7 crisis care, collaborate with law enforcement and schools and coordinate with hospitals to reduce emergency department visits and readmissions. This is the model for the future and our goal is to extend it nationwide.

2 RESPOND TO THE ADDICTION CRISIS

More than 20 million Americans are living with a drug or alcohol addiction. At the same time, drug overdose deaths — from opioids and other drugs — have more than tripled since 1990. This is unacceptable. The National Council is fighting to build capacity in our delivery system to ensure that everyone who seeks treatment is able to receive it. We will continue to fight to remove barriers to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) while advocating for funding sufficient to address the addiction crisis nationwide, including the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant



and other programs funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. We will work to strengthen the availability of resources and incentives to help states and local governments expand drug treatment, prevention and recovery efforts.

3 STRENGTHEN THE FIELD: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

It is estimated the current field of behavioral health care professionals can only meet 26 percent of the need for services nationwide, and the deficit is significantly greater in rural areas. Projections suggest that the problem will get exponentially worse without targeted interventions. The National Council will work to support policies that incentivize more people to pursue careers in the addiction and mental health field, through enhanced reimbursement policies that enable clinics to pay competitive wages, expansion of Medicare reimbursement, loan repayment programs and more.

4 BUILD ON THE PARITY LAW

More than 10 years after the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act was passed, people are still being denied access to mental health and addiction treatment on par with physical health care. Furthermore, too often, insurance coverage continues to be inadequate, especially for people experiencing their first episode of psychosis. That is unacceptable. We must treat mental illnesses and addictions the same way we treat cancer or heart disease, by ensuring access to evidence-based care when and where it is needed. The National Council will work with policymakers, providers and advocates to ensure full implementation of parity in all 50 states. Where the parity law is not sufficient to ensure robust coverage, we will work with advocates to change federal and state laws.

5 EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

More than 2 million individuals have been trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to identify and effectively respond to people who are experiencing mental illness and substance use disorders. We know that anyone, anywhere, can make a difference and potentially save a life – in their schools, communities, places of work and worship. The National Council will advocate for additional state and federal funding to ensure MHFA training is available to police officers, teachers and other critical audiences in every community.

NATIONAL COUNCIL : READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

We have made tremendous progress as a nation, reducing stigma and expanding access to care. But we have more to do. We know that recovery is possible, and we believe it should be the expectation – not the exception.

At the National Council for Behavioral Health, we are fighting for a nation that values the mental health of all its people. And we are ready to leverage every aspect of our organization to make a difference for the future. Our 3,326 member organizations operate in all 50 states. They employ more than 750,000 professionals and serve over 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions. Two million Americans have been trained in Mental Health First Aid. We are united in our mission and we are working to make a difference. Join us and let's make a difference.

TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE VISIT [THENATIONALCOUNCIL.ORG/POLICY](https://thenationalcouncil.org/policy).

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