

NATIONAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PLATFORM:

A Nonpartisan Approach to Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders

For decades, we have cherry-picked individual issues in behavioral health during election years, and then we act surprised when there is no real improvement in care or health. While the rates of suicide and opiate addiction in our nation are at an all-time high, no behavioral health issue can be successfully addressed as an isolated problem. It is time for both parties to embrace a comprehensive approach to reforming diagnosis and treatment for mental illness and substance use disorders.

To do that, we need a bold national platform. One that fully embraces the comorbidity of mental illness and addiction; one that acknowledges how discrimination prevents people from getting care and families from supporting care; one that supports all evidence-based approaches to treatment.

WE URGE YOU TO CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND REQUEST THEY ADOPT THIS PLATFORM.

Here are the top priorities for the comprehensive national platform -

1. Every medical examination must include a behavioral health evaluation followed by an aggressive plan of early diagnosis and intervention, when appropriate
2. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should establish a broad mental health surveillance system
3. Congress should pass a one-time five-year tripling of the budgets of the National Institutes of Health that cover the brain
4. The Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor and state regulatory agencies must fully implement the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act
5. We must increase the number of inpatient beds by amending the IMD exclusion and increase the number of behavioral health providers through training grant fellowships and incentive payments
6. Records for mental health and substance use disorder treatment must be integrated into electronic health-record systems so providers have the information needed to treat the whole person—while still protecting patient privacy.
7. We must make an impact on the nation's rising suicide rates by adopting evidence based programs, like ZeroSuicide, nationwide

8. Every county should implement a system of diverting individuals with serious mental illnesses or co-occurring substance use disorders into community-based treatment instead of jail
9. We must implement outcomes driven collaborative care programs in every care setting
10. Mental wellness programs should be required in all public and private schools
11. All American employers should examine and improve their health insurance and employee assistance programs' coverage of mental illnesses and substance use disorders
12. We must increase access to evidence-based care for substance use disorders by requiring insurers to cover a comprehensive range of treatments, including medication assisted treatment

In 2016, we have the opportunity to dramatically improve diagnosis and treatment for people living with behavioral health disorders. But we must stop jumping between high-profile emergencies and instead develop a comprehensive approach that predicts, mitigates and prevents emergencies in the first place.

This platform was created by the Kennedy Forum (<https://www.thekennedyforum.org>) and the Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation (<http://www.scattergoodfoundation.org>). We urge stakeholder groups large and small, and individual voters across the country, to support and embrace it.