

**MENTAL HEALTH &  
SUICIDE PREVENTION**  
NATIONAL RESPONSE  
TO COVID-19

An initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention



**The Path Forward**  
for mental health and substance use  
Health Equity for all Americans

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**The Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19 Joins  
Together with National Initiative of Business Leaders to Advance Mental Health  
and Suicide Prevention**

*Influential national groups commit to strengthening access to mental health care in the wake of the  
COVID-19 pandemic*

**WASHINGTON, DC (February 23, 2021)**—In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading national groups representing business, government, nonprofits, and health care providers and plans have come together to accelerate actionable solutions to close persistent gaps in access, quality, and affordability of care for mental health and substance use disorders. [The Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19](#) (National Response), an initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance), and [The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use](#) (The Path Forward), today announced a collaboration to increase access to evidence-based treatments for mental health and substance use disorders in both specialty and primary care settings.

According to a [recent national survey](#), over half of respondents indicated strong support for increasing use of telehealth therapy, providing mental health care where patients already receive their health care (e.g., predominantly within primary care settings), and increasing mental health services for those who live and work in areas that have been most affected by COVID-19. This speaks to the need to strengthen care, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

To achieve the systems-level change needed, the groups will work together to implement their shared goals to:

- Expand use of the Collaborative Care Model (the leading evidence-based approach to provide mental health and substance use disorder services in primary care settings)
- Increase use of measurement-based care to drive early detection of behavioral conditions and improve patient outcomes
- Expand tele-behavioral health
- Ensure equitable access to care for all Americans

The Action Alliance's National Response is an unprecedented public-private partnership working to address urgent and long-term needs regarding mental health and suicide-related challenges that may result from the COVID-19 pandemic. Guided by a Steering Committee of diverse senior leaders from industry and government, the National Response is committed to bringing about meaningful and lasting policy, system, and cultural change through collaboration, leadership, and action.

“The business community plays a critical role in increasing access to mental health care and changing the culture around mental health in our society,” said Colleen Carr, director of the Action Alliance, which is housed at the Education Development Center. “Private sector leadership is needed now, more than ever, to ensure we prioritize mental health in our national COVID-19 response efforts and take action today to ensure increased access to evidence-based mental health care going forward. By partnering with The Path Forward, the National Response is bringing together leading voices and agents of change from the private sector to transform mental health and substance use care so everyone can access the care, support, and services they need—where and when they need them.”

The Path Forward is a multi-stakeholder group implementing a national initiative to improve the delivery of affordable and effective behavioral healthcare. Two major employer coalitions, the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions and the HR Policy Association, have joined with behavioral health providers and experts through the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health, and the Meadow Mental Health Policy Institute to further expand the implementation of evidence-based reforms in both the general medical system and the specialty behavioral health system.

“Data show that employees are facing more stressors during the pandemic and are at a much-increased risk for mental and behavioral health conditions,” said Colleen McHugh, executive vice president of the American Health Policy Institute, strategic advisor for HR Policy Association and a member of both the National Response Steering Committee and The Path Forward. “This new collaborative brings together key stakeholders to collectively break this data trend by improving the access to evidenced-based care and outcomes for employees and their families who need mental and behavioral health care. Working together will enable us to meet our long-term goal of integrating behavioral health into primary care.”

#### **About the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention**

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance) is the public-private partnership, housed at the [Education Development Center](#) (EDC), working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) provides funding to EDC to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010. Learn more at [theactionalliance.org](http://theactionalliance.org) and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

#### **About the Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19**

The [Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19](#) (National Response) is a dynamic, diverse, nonpartisan group of leading public and private sector organizations that are committed to driving meaningful, lasting change through collaboration, leadership, and action. As an initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention—housed at the Education Development Center—the National Response is the unifying national voice and galvanizing force for accelerating actionable solutions to strengthen mental health, suicide prevention, and resilience for all Americans.

#### **About The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use**

The Path Forward is a first-of-its kind private sector initiative to drive market-based improvements in behavioral health treatment and health equity for all Americans. The Path Forward stakeholders are implementing five evidence-based reforms to improve access to effective, affordable and timely behavioral health treatment, and reduce total healthcare costs. To leverage the influence of business

coalitions, Regional Employer Stakeholder Engagement Teams (RESET) have been established in key regions across the country (CA, FL, KS, MD/DC/VA, MN, NY/NJ/CT, TN and TX).

The Path Forward's partners are the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, American Health Policy Institute, American Psychiatric Association Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health, American Psychiatric Association, The Bowman Family Foundation, HR Policy Association and Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. [Learn more here.](#)

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#### **FOR MEDIA PARTNERS**

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, more suicides can be prevented. We urge all members of the media working on these stories to refer to the [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) for best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide (such as including the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK \[8255\]](#)). For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to [suicidepreventionlifeline.org/stories/](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/stories/).