

JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

Policymakers

“I am living proof that there is hope after opioid addiction. You are looking at the true face of this epidemic, the true face of one of the lucky ones who happened to stumble into a treatment center that prioritized science and research over stigma and fear.”

- Zac Talbott





TARGETED OUTREACH

Policymakers

Untreated mental and substance use disorders not only have devastating personal consequences to individuals and families, but they create financial, economic, and social hardships at all levels in the community, which has an impact on policymaking. Fortunately, when investments are made in prevention, treatment, and recovery support, these challenges can be reduced. We count on our policymakers to advocate for recovery by enacting evidence-based policies at the local, state, and federal levels to help more Americans access the help they need to be healthy and productive citizens. This year's theme of **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, "*Join the Voices for Recovery: Invest in Health, Home, Purpose and Community*," brings policymakers to the forefront of the conversation by providing them with the latest data, information on at-risk populations, and guidance for investing in recovery for their communities.

Policymakers:

Invest in **community** by advocating for and funding behavioral health programs at the local, state, and national levels.



The Issue

States and communities across the country are experiencing a public health crisis with the opioid epidemic. The time to address the needs of individuals with substance use disorders is now. Behavioral health conditions affect individuals and families in every corner of the U.S. In 2016, approximately 20.1 million people aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder related to their use of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year, and about 44.7 million Americans aged 18 and older experienced a mental disorder in the past year.¹

Policymakers recognize and are addressing the fact that the adverse effects of untreated behavioral health conditions are widespread, as

shown by these statistics:

- The National Institute of Drug Abuse estimates that substance misuse exacts more than \$740 billion annually in costs related to crime, lost work productivity, and health care.²
- Communities across our nation are facing an opioid use issue. In 2016, an estimated 11.8 million people misused opioids in the past year.³
- Mental and substance use disorders feed into other problems facing American communities such as homelessness and incarceration – in 2016, approximately one in five people experiencing homelessness also had a serious mental illness,⁴ and in 2011, more than a third (37 percent) of federal and state prisoners had been told by a mental health professional in the past that they had a mental disorder.⁵
- In 2016, about 333,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 had both a substance use disorder and a major depressive episode in the past year – and 239,000 of adolescents in this age group received substance use disorder treatment or mental health treatment.⁶

Policymakers can help by elevating the conversation around behavioral health conditions in our country and enacting policies to support recovery in American communities.



Audience Tip:

Refer to the “Events and Media Outreach” section of the toolkit for information on issuing a proclamation or planning an event to raise awareness of mental and substance use disorders in your community.



What You Can Do

Local, state, and federal policymakers can be instrumental in reducing barriers to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. They must allocate resources to these services to create healthier, safer, and more productive communities, work with health care providers to improve the quality of care, and work to change laws, rules, policies, and practices that create barriers to treatment and recovery support services. Proactive, passionate policymakers can help make recovery an expected outcome of behavioral health services in the United States and the services that facilitate and support it a priority.

Policymakers can strengthen the communities they represent by advocating for treatment access and recovery support. They have opportunities to:

- Advocate for insurers to provide equitable coverage for behavioral health conditions comparable to other medical conditions;
- Help safeguard coverage for behavioral health conditions by insurers, so that it is at parity with other medical conditions, as required by law;
- Identify segments of the community who experience more adverse health outcomes, such as veterans and youth, who are at increased risk for certain disorders and ensure they have the tools they need to seek treatment; and

- Foster the creation of safe spaces and housing for those experiencing mental and substance use disorders; and amplify the national conversation surrounding these issues in their communities.

Audience Tip:

Refer to the “Common Mental Disorders and Commonly Misused Substances” section for data on how behavioral health conditions affect individuals throughout the country.



Resources

Policy and action are most effective when they are enacted by informed leaders. Visit the pages below to learn more about how policymakers can change the lives of constituents affected by behavioral health conditions.

- **Addiction Policy Forum** (<http://www.addictionpolicy.org>): Supports a diverse partnership of organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to working together to elevate awareness around addiction and to improve national policy through a comprehensive response that includes prevention, treatment, recovery, and criminal justice reform.
- **Council of State Governments-Mental Health and Substance Abuse Page** (<http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/category/policy-area/health/mental-health-and-substance-abuse>): Provides state government professionals with resources to treat and prevent mental and substance use disorders.



“I continue to grow in my recovery, practicing daily the principles and steps that saved my life. My marriage is stronger than ever, my kids are back in my life, my company is taking off and my life has been given back to me.”



- **Faces & Voices of Recovery** (<https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org>): Acts as a national organization that supports the 23 million Americans living in recovery to ensure their rights and access to needed services as well as demonstrates the power and proof of obtaining long-term recovery.
- **National Alliance for Recovery Residences** (<http://narronline.org>): Certifies recovery residences using national standards.
- **National Alliance for State Model Drug Laws** (<http://www.namsdl.org>): Helps those striving for comprehensive and effective state drug and alcohol laws, policies, regulations, and programs.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness-Public Policy Page** (<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Public-Policy>): Explains recovery-related policy issues such as family support, access to care, and behavioral health screening.
- **National Association of Counties “Behavioral Health Matters to Counties” Fact Sheet** (<http://www.naco.org/resources/behavioral-health-matters-counties>): Provides county government professionals with opportunities and resources for recovery support.
- **National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors** (<http://nacbhdd.org>): Supports county and local policymakers who make decisions affecting behavioral health conditions and disabilities.
- **National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors** (<http://nasadad.org>): Organizes, funds, and regulates substance use disorder prevention and treatment systems on behalf of state officials.
- **National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors** (<https://nasmhpd.org/>): Supports government stakeholders who contribute to and direct mental health programs.
- **National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery** (<https://www.ncmhr.org/>): Advocates for mental health reform and promotes recovery from a public health perspective.
- **National Conference of State Legislatures Mental Health and Substance Abuse Page** (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/diseases-and-conditions/mental-health-and-substance-abuse.aspx>): Provides information on key policy issues facing state legislatures in the mental health and substance use domains.
- **National Council for Behavioral Health** (<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/>): Unites health care organizations and policymakers to address behavioral health conditions in the U.S.
- **National Institute of Mental Health Legislative Activities Page** (<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/outreach/legislative-activities/index.shtml>): Details federal legislation and Congressional committees relevant to behavioral health conditions.
- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism: Helping Patients Who Drink too Much: A Clinician’s Guide** (<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/guide>): Provides strategies to help clinicians detect and address high-risk drinking in general medical settings.
- **Surgeon General’s Facing Addiction in America Fact Sheet and Recommendations for State, Local, and Tribal Governments** (<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/fact-sheet-governments.pdf>): Provides facts and guidance for state, local, and tribal governments in addressing substance use and substance use disorders.

This list is not exhaustive of all available resources. Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



¹ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2017). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, NSDUH Series H-52, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 17-5044, p. 2. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Web. 3 October 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2016/NSDUH-FFR1-2016.pdf>

² “Trends & Statistics.” National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2017). Web. 3 October 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics>

³ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2017). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, NSDUH Series H-52, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 17-5044, p. 1. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Web. 3 October 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2016/NSDUH-FFR1-2016.pdf>

⁴ Henry, M., Watt, R., Rosenthal, L., and Shivji, A. “The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress from: HUD 2016 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations,” p. 2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. (2016). Web. 3 October 2017. Retrieved from https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_NatITerrDC_2016.pdf

⁵ Bronson, J., and Berzofsky, M. “Indicators of Mental Health Problems Reported by Prisoners

and Jail inmates, 2011-2012,” p. 1. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2017). Web. 1 November 2017. Retrieved from https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprpji1112_sum.pdf

⁶ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2017). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, NSDUH Series H-52, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 17-5044, p. 3, p. 32-33. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Web. 1 November 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2016/NSDUH-FFR1-2016.pdf>