

# Improving Mental Health Care

## Background

**Mental health is a state of well-being in which people realize their capabilities, can handle the stress of everyday life, can successfully work, and are able to meaningfully contribute to their community.** People with serious mental health conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder experience higher suicide rates and significantly reduced lifespans. The economic burden of these mental illnesses is enormous. For example, costs of depression in 2010 totaled \$210.5 billion. People with inadequately treated mental illness make up a large percentage of the population in prisons, emergency rooms, and homeless shelters.



Our current mental health care system is inadequate in providing the millions affected by mental illness with the treatment they need. We must eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and to openly discuss ways to bring it to the forefront of decision-making. With the right combination of support and care, individuals with mental health conditions can and do live satisfying lives and give back to their community. As a policymaker, you have the power to reform the mental health care system. Improved mental health policies give affected individuals the hope and opportunity to recover and contribute to society. It is time to prioritize mental health, because health is not just the physical, but also a state of mind.

## What Has Been Done

### Affordable Care Act (ACA):

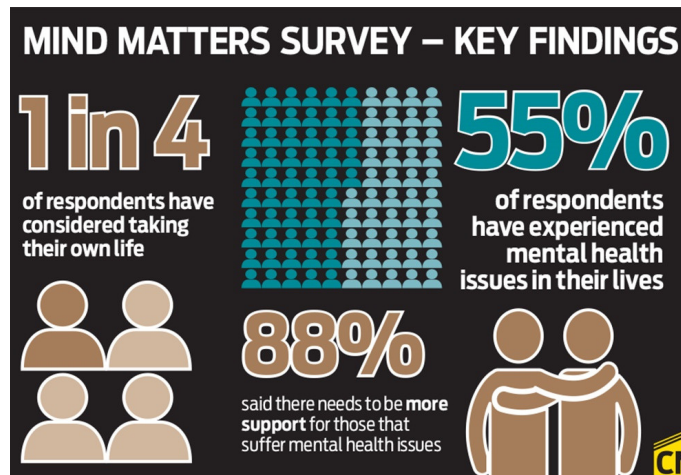
- Expanded mental health coverage
- Made it illegal to deny insurance for people with preexisting conditions including mental illness
- Expanded **parity** – health plans must treat mental health and substance abuse treatment equally with other medical care

### Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):

- Protects individuals with depression, PTSD, and other mental health conditions in the workplace

### Mental Health America (MHA):

- America's leading community-based nonprofit organization
- Promotes mental health and addresses the needs of affected individuals through advocacy, education, and service



## Recommendations

### 1. Develop and implement evidence-based programs

Breakthroughs in behavioral and neuroscience research have led to evidence-based treatment models that can significantly improve outcomes for those with mental illness conditions. To be most effective, these treatment models must be correctly and consistently delivered by a multidisciplinary healthcare team. Mental health care training programs focusing on skills essential to evidence-based practices need to be established.

### 3. Reform finance/reimbursement models

As mentioned above, the economic burden of mental illness should serve as major motivation for payment reform. Make changes to align reimbursement guidelines with new models of mental health care and services. Measurement-based care, in which treatment is connected with outcomes, has been developed in payment for the care of diabetes, hypertension, and other nonpsychiatric medical conditions. It now must be applied to the mental health care system and corresponding payment models.

### 2. Create portals of entry

Portals of access to mental health services must be created for each specific population. These portals would either be located in, or have connections with, hospitals, clinics, schools, workplaces, community organizations, etc. A strong mental health network must be formed with portals of entry in various settings so that anyone can easily access mental health services that best fit their needs. People living in rural areas would require technological services such as telehealth.

### 4. Improve health information technology (HIT) for mental health

HIT has already revolutionized health care for physical health conditions and now can be utilized to improve mental health care. Opportunity areas include computerized clinical decision support, telemedicine, and computer-assisted versions of psychosocial treatments for patients with severe mental illness. Integrating and providing training in HIT within mental health environments are also critical to achieving collaboration among health care providers.