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Media Statement from National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention on New Data Showing Significant Inequalities in Access to Behavioral Health Care

A media statement prepared by the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(Action Alliance\)](#) about a just-released report looking at disparities between physical and behavioral health care. For media inquiries, contact Kim Torguson (ktorguson@edc.org or 774-454-2768).

“The new report, [Addiction and Mental Health vs. Physical Health: Widening disparities in network use and provider reimbursement](#), confirms the troubling conclusion that today’s behavioral health care is both inadequate and insufficient—further emphasizing the need for continued efforts to improve access to behavioral health care, especially if we want to reduce suicide rates in the U.S. This important report, conducted by Milliman, Inc. and commissioned by The Bowman Family Foundation, underscores that we must do better to remove barriers that keep people from receiving affordable, accessible, and appropriate care they need, and deserve—especially for those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, mental illness, and/or substance use disorders (SUD).”

As the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34, and the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 35 and 54, suicide is a significant public health crisis, and yet suicide care is not treated on par with physical health care, such as heart attacks or diabetes. With suicide rates and opioid overdoses escalating in the U.S., now more than ever, we must remove obstacles that are impeding individuals at risk for suicide from accessing care. Together, health care systems and payers must do more to make both access to and reimbursements for effective suicide care equitable with that for physical health issues.

The findings of the report highlight that there are significant barriers to accessing in-network behavioral health care, forcing many patients to secure care out-of-network, causing them to navigate systems and providers that may be unfamiliar or inaccessible. This can lead to delays in care that too often lead to care denied altogether.

The Action Alliance – the nation’s public-private partnership working with over 250 multisectoral groups to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) – is committed to suicide care in the U.S. The Action Alliance, in collaboration with leading national experts, developed recommendations on effective care for patients at risk for suicide, [Recommended Standard Care for People with Suicide Risk: Making Health Care Suicide Safe](#), and developed and launched the nation’s [Zero Suicide initiative](#)—which aims to improve suicide care throughout health and behavioral health care systems.

Providing better and more effective behavioral health care, regardless of the clinical setting (mental health, primary care, emergency department), benefits payers, providers, and patients by lowering health care costs, improving care, and, ultimately, saving lives.”

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Additional responses/quotes from Action Alliance Executive Committee Members:

“It is vital that mental health providers have parity with other medical providers to ensure everyone who seeks services has access to affordable and comprehensive care. As suicide rates continue to increase at an alarming level, we desperately need to focus on breaking down the barriers to care and supporting legislation that is going to transform access to mental health resources and ultimately save lives. Ensuring that people are able to easily find and afford the care they need is a critical objective of the mental health industry.”

- **David C. Guth, Jr., CEO, Centerstone**

“This latest Milliman research report provides a quantifiable framework to what many of us thought we already knew; individuals experiencing mental health and substance use challenges are not able to access care as effectively as someone experiencing a physical health issue. And it’s not close. This leads to undue burden on the person, law enforcement, emergency departments and justice systems. The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention’s Zero Suicide and Crisis Now efforts include concrete solutions that not only resolve these issues but do so while lowering costs and improving care. We must bring them to life. The lack of no-wrong-door crisis service options in communities across this nation is simply unacceptable and largely the result of a complete dearth in health care parity enforcement that requires access to care in a manner that aligns with ambulance and emergency department service counterparts. Unfortunately, far too many payers of health care services turn a blind eye to those experiencing the greatest mental health and substance use needs.”

- **David Covington, CEO and President, RI International**

“Today’s health care system should be treating suicide prevention as we treat other chronic health issues, like heart disease or diabetes. Suicide care should be a responsibility and a norm – not an exception – of all health care organizations.”

- **Mike Hogan, Principal, Hogan Solutions**

FOR NEWS MEDIA PARTNERS:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on and depict suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people effectively coping with thoughts of suicide, more suicidal behaviors and deaths by 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 www.lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org.

NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) is the public-private partnership 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 the Education Development Center to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which launched in 2010. Learn more at theActionAlliance.org, and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).