

*For Immediate Release*

**Unprecedented Mental Health Leadership Collaboration Expands to Welcome 35 New Organizations as Key Signatories on its Unified Vision to Improve Mental Health and Substance Use Care in America**

*New Signatories include American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Counseling Association, Clinical Social Work Association, Consortium Representing Eating Disorders Care, Mental Health Coalition, National Federation of Families, NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, Among Many Others*

*Unified Vision Includes Focus on Early Intervention, Emergency Crisis Response, Leveling of Racial and Economic Inequalities, Parity in Payment by Insurance Plans, and Other Core Issues*

**Washington, D.C. – Thursday, February 25, 2021** – An unprecedented collaboration of mental health and substance use disorder organizations today announced support from 35 additional entities, each signing onto the collaboration’s Unified Vision, a 7-pillar roadmap developed to address the future of mental health and substance use care in America.

Founded in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the collaboration is the only group of its kind that includes collaboration by the chief executives of the nation’s premier mental health and substance use disorder care organizations, all working in unprecedented unity to advance core issues in the United States.

In December, the collaboration released its Unified Vision, a key series of action items intended to prompt and establish policy, programs and standards that prioritize mental health and substance use care and address the social and economic conditions – including racism and discrimination – that disproportionately impact people of color and people whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold, and result in inadequate and inequitable access to effective, humane treatment.

“Accomplishing real, substantive change to our country’s mental health care and substance use systems is a significant undertaking, one that will require collaboration and coordination from all involved in the sector,” said Tyler Norris, Chief Executive Officer, Well Being Trust. “No one person or organization can do it alone, and the collaboration is looking to prompt discussion and forge partnerships that will ultimately transform the future of mental health care in the United States. We welcome this critical show of support for our mission from our most recent signees.”

Founding members of the collaboration and creators of the Unified Vision are the **American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Mental Health America, the National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, the National Alliance on**

**Mental Illness, the National Council for Behavioral Health, One Mind, Peg’s Foundation, the Steinberg Institute, The Kennedy Forum, the Treatment Advocacy Center and Well Being Trust.**

“An early priority is to break down the silos that currently exist in the mental health and substance use care space, which are all too often barriers to systemic change,” said Daniel H. Gillison, Jr., from NAMI. “Our leadership team and recent signatories collectively represent close to 40 independent organizations, willing to work together on one of the direst issues of our time. We thank our signatories for their crucial support, and we look forward to even more progress in the weeks and months ahead.”

The organizations and mental health experts signing onto the Unified Vision are:

<b>Active Minds</b>	<b>American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</b>
<b>American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA)</b>	<b>American Association on Health and Disability</b>
<b>American Counseling Association</b>	<b>American Group Psychotherapy Association</b>
<b>Anxiety and Depression Association of America</b>	<b>Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare</b>
<b>Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)</b>	<b>Centerstone</b>
<b>Clinical Social Work Association</b>	<b>The College for Behavioral Health Leadership</b>
<b>College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists</b>	<b>Consortium Representing Eating Disorders Care</b>
<b>DMAX Foundation</b>	<b>Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy &amp; Action</b>
<b>Fletcher Group, Inc.</b>	<b>Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice</b>
<b>Inseparable</b>	<b>International OCD Foundation</b>
<b>The International Society for Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses</b>	<b>The Jewish Federations of North America</b>
<b>Lakeshore Foundation</b>	<b>Mental Health Coalition</b>

<b>Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance</b>	<b>National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health</b>
<b>NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals</b>	<b>National Association of School Nurses</b>
<b>National Association of Social Workers</b>	<b>National Federation of Families</b>
<b>Psychotherapy Action Network (PsiAN)</b>	<b>RI International</b>
<b>SMART Recovery</b>	<b>The Stability Network</b>
<b>Trust for America’s Health</b>	

Since the onset of the pandemic, [prevalence of depression](#) symptoms have jumped three-fold, [overdose deaths](#) have increased in 40 states, and the [CDC reports](#) that 25 percent of young adults struggle with suicidal ideation. Just as the public health care system was unprepared for a pandemic, an unprecedented mental health and substance use crisis [afflicting half of all Americans](#) has overwhelmed the mental health and substance use care systems.

The Unified Vision offers tried-and-tested “pathways for success” across seven critical policy areas identified as:

1. Early identification and prevention, especially for families and young people;
2. Rapid deployment of emergency crisis response and suicide prevention;
3. Leveling inequities in access to care;
4. Establishing integrated health and mental health care to ensure “whole-person” well-being;
5. Achieving parity in payment by health plans for mental health and substance-use coverage;
6. Assuring evidence-based standards of treatments and care; and,
7. Engaging a diverse mental health care workforce, peer support and community-based programs.

Included in the vision is a detailed proposal for how the new Administration, Congress, Governors and state and local lawmakers must work in tandem with the business community and the non-profit sector to promote systemic changes in the mental health and substance-use care system.

Among the seven suggestions are a number of ideas that can be implemented quickly, such as, embracing telehealth, and implementing strategic shifts to early intervention that can help provide relief by bringing telehealth outside of clinical settings – and into schools, community centers, prisons; fast-tracking new emergency response systems, such as the new “988” National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, for immediate access on mobile carriers; and, engaging a diverse

mental health and substance-use care workforce, providing additional support means by expanding access to peer support groups and community based programs.

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### **Organizational Quotes**

#### **Active Minds founder and Executive Director Alison Malmon**

"The pandemic will have a lasting effect on the mental health of our nation's young adults. In fact, 89% of college students already reported experiencing stress or anxiety as a result of COVID-19. It will take collaboration and leadership across all levels of our society to deal with the ramifications of the last year. Active Minds is honored to be a part of the Unified Vision to work with other leaders in the field to create real, lasting change to the mental health care system in our country through innovative policy, programs, and standards."

#### **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Executive Director/CEO Heidi B. Ford, CAE, AACAP**

"We look forward to collaborating with this strong cadre of allied groups as we continue to work with our membership, patients, and programs to ensure that our collective strength, especially addressing the unique needs of children, is part of the solution. As an organization dedicated to the health and well-being of children and families everywhere, we remain committed to promoting diversity, inclusion, and health equity at every turn. We stand by our mission to promote the healthy development of children, adolescents, and families through advocacy, education, and research."

#### **American Association on Health and Disability Public Policy Director and Lakeshore Foundation Washington Representative E. Clarke Ross**

"As national public health organizations, achieving the vision would greatly improve the health and wellness of persons with mental illness and substance use disorder. The vision addresses multiple significant elements in a comprehensive way. From a cross-disability perspective, we appreciate the reference to Medicaid home-and-community-based services and the "independent living" approach. We are particularly interested in an essential element for serving the whole health situation of persons with mental illness and substance abuse disorder - "bi-directional" integration of behavioral health, general health, and primary care. From a cross-disability orientation, we are particularly focused on persons with co-occurring disorders, including persons with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder and persons with co-occurring intellectual/developmental disability and mental illness."

#### **American Counseling Association CEO Richard Yep**

"The American Counseling Association is pleased to lend our name to this critical effort. Our 52,000 professional counselors work with millions of children, adolescents, adults, couples, families, and communities each and every day. ACA joins with the other major mental health advocacy organizations because we are at a critical moment in our society and world. We know real change happens with focus and commitment. The need for action has never been more pressing, which is why we proudly stand with our colleagues in support of realizing a more compassionate, supportive, and fully resourced mental health service delivery system."

#### **Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare Executive Director Stephen Michael, DrPH**

"AABH is honored to be supporting efforts to better identify and link people dealing with mental health issues to services that best serve the individual's needs. Our members are always eager to meet the growing needs of anyone struggling with mental health issues or substance issues."

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

“Through working together to break down barriers in accessing care and incenting data driven care that focuses on advancing health equity, we move one step closer to deploying a behavioral health system that will truly deliver the care patients need, when they need it most.”

**Clinical Social Work Association Director for Policy and Practice Laura Groshong, LICSW**

"The Clinical Social Work Association represents the thousands of social workers who are on the frontlines every day and we see firsthand the urgent need for additional mental health supports, particularly around active enforcement of the mental health parity law. We're pleased to join with so many other organizations in pushing forward a vision for the future of mental health and substance use care that will help our members better serve our communities."

**The College for Behavioral Health Leadership CEO Holly Salazar**

“The importance of aligning agendas and working together across sectors cannot be understated if we are to make real changes to our mental health and substance use care system. The systemic transformation we are embarking on will take a new kind of leader - prepared to innovate, transform and lead us into the future. CBHL is pleased to support the Unified Vision and stand ready to take the important steps in actualizing it.”

**DMAX Foundation Executive Director and Co-Founder Laurie Burstein-Maxwell**

“Through our work to create connections and conversations that matter to strengthen the mental health and emotional well-being for students on college campuses, DMAX Foundation is seeing firsthand the importance of re-envisioning the future of mental health care in the United States so that we can come together to openly discuss our challenges and ensure that appropriate early intervention is available to all who need it. We're proud to sign-on to the Unified Vision and join organizations from around the country as we work together to build a stronger path forward for mental health care in the United States.”

**Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action Board President Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS**

“The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action is honored to join forces with many of our esteemed mental health colleagues to work toward a more equitable and just healthcare system for individuals, families and loved ones struggling with mental health and substance use disorders. Early identification and prevention of eating disorders remains a key policy initiative for the EDC, and we look with hope to this bright constellation of organizations uniting to light the way.”

**Fletcher Group, Inc. CEO Dave Johnson, MSW, ACSW**

"The Fletcher Group is proud to endorse Unified Vision, a seven-point roadmap developed to address the future of mental health and substance abuse care in America. Our organization promotes Recovery Ecosystems that incorporate recovery housing as a key element in the "whole-person" continuum of care approach to recovery and well-being."

**The International Society for Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses Policy Committee Chair Sally Raphael**

“We nurses strongly believe there is greater success for mental health promotion with increased voices and votes.”

**Mental Health Coalition Executive Director Jennifer Moore**

“The Mental Health Coalition is proud to sign onto the Unified Vision. We believe stigma serves as one of the key barriers to creating systemic change in the mental healthcare system and hope this unified and thoughtful proposal can help the nation prioritize mental health during this critical time.”

**NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals Executive Director, Cynthia Moreno Tuohy**  
“In these unprecedented times with the co-occurrence of COVID, economic, mental health and substance use disorders pandemics, it is essential that we collaborate to build enduring, effective systems that will diminish the outcomes of these pandemics and put our country on the road to recovery.”

**National Association of School Nurses Executive Director Donna J. Mazyck, MS, RN, NCSN, CAE, FNASN**

“One in six k-12 age children has a treatable mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Yet nearly half of children with these disorders did not receive counseling from a mental health professional. School nurses, because of their frequent connections with students are often the ones who identify behavioral health concerns and get students into treatment. The National Association of School Nurses is proud to be part of this effort to accomplish real, substantive change to our country’s mental health care system.”

**National Association of Social Workers CEO Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW**

“As the nation’s largest provider of mental and behavioral health services, social workers recognize that promoting improved mental health and well-being for all people, especially for Black, Brown and Indigenous people, requires transformative systemic and structural changes. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate in new ways to realize the aspirations outlined in the Unified Vision”.

**RI International President & CEO David W. Covington, LPC, MBA**

“Having a comprehensive and unified vision for behavioral health care can be the foundation for preventing tragedies of public safety, civil rights abuses, extraordinary and unacceptable loss of lives, and the waste of precious resources. This vision offers the promise of hope, well-being, and equity in these challenging times.”

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