

Katerina Rahhal

Mr. Rutherford

Oxford Scholars

13 November 2019

The Mental Health Care Crisis

The United States of America has fallen into a mental health care crisis and has been struggling for years on end to get out of it. The lack of attention being given to the mental health care system has directly affected not only those suffering from mental illnesses but also professionals working to fight against the growing problem. The demand for treatments is only increasing from here, but yet access to them is being proven more difficult to obtain. This issue has already made its mark on the upcoming 2020 election, proving to be a topic worth talking about. It is now up to the government and insurers to help America out of this crisis under the lead of the country's next president.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, also known as NAMI, is one of the largest mental health organizations in the nation. Each year, they provide statistical information from the previous year in order to raise awareness about the growing issue of mental illness and erase the stigma. In 2018, NAMI recorded that 1 in 5 adults, excluding the youth, experience a mental illness each year (Mental Health Care By The Numbers). Out of these roughly 66 million Americans, only 43.3% of them received any treatment in 2018, specifically (Mental Health Care By The Numbers), which is frighteningly similar to the results projected by Constellation Behavioral Health in 2016 (Ellis). One would hope that the percentages decrease over time but alas, they're only growing larger. Untreated mental illnesses can lead to many life-altering long-term and short-term consequences, some even fatal. For example, according to the National

Institute on Drug Abuse, studies show that about half of those who experience a mental illness throughout their lives also experience a substance abuse disorder, increasing the risk of death by overdose. Suicide is now the 2nd leading cause of death in America (Mental Health Care By Numbers). These untreated illnesses can affect the economy, as well, a subject that NAMI has already investigated. In 2018, they estimated that the country spends around \$197.2 billion in lost earnings every year (Mental Health Care By Numbers). This is due to the effect that removing insurance safeguards has when dealing with the mental health system. Insurance safeguards are what ensure that people can receive health coverage and keep it, helping them to secure happy, healthy, and productive lifestyles. Without these safeguards, their productivity in the labor force decreases, hitting the economy head-on. (Health Reform and Mental Illness)

So why is it that millions of adults go untreated? One of the reasons is not being able to afford the proper health care needed to help them get back onto their feet. The mental health parity laws that were put into place to guarantee insurer reimbursement for any treatment were being interfered with by various factors, including the lack of treatment providers (Gruber). NAMI stated that over 60% of US counties did not have a single practicing psychiatrist. One cause for this shortage in mental health professionals was explained by Dr. Jerry Halverson in the U.S. News: “The supply has not caught up yet... there is a perception that inadequate pay is discouraging some students from choosing mental health fields as a specialty.” (What's the Answer to the Shortage) When referencing how the supply has not “caught up yet”, he is referring to the increased demand for mental health treatments as the social stigma lessens. Despite this, the supply for mental health professionals has not increased by much, causing there to be a severe shortage. As a result, the price for receiving treatments has sky-rocketed, quickly becoming unaffordable to many. The high costs and poor insurance coverage are looked at as

“the top barriers for accessing mental health care” (New Study Reveals). This lack of government and insurer funding is what makes gaining access to the proper treatments difficult.

Now the big question: how can this crisis be fixed? One evident solution is for the US government to provide more funding and support into mental health research. This could encourage prospective researchers to enter into the mental health research field and quicken research progress. However, several Congressional lawmakers are arguing that social science funding should not be prioritized over areas such as math and science. (Gruber) But how can one suffering from an untreated mental illness excel as an engineer or a physician? The mental health issue affects too many Americans for it to go unnoticed. By funding mental health care research and treating these individuals, productivity in the workforce is guaranteed to increase, meaning that the engineer and physician can work to their full potential. In the end, this cuts back on the billions of dollars that the country loses due to the consequences that stem from mental illnesses and other disorders.

The actions needed to be taken in order to improve the struggling mental health system need to be addressed in the upcoming 2020 election. A survey conducted by Mental Health for US was sent out in July 2019 to receive insights on the presidential candidates' thoughts on critical topics surrounding mental health and addiction. So far, only seven out of the thirteen candidates have answered, all demonstrating concern for the state of the mental health system and proposing various actions and policies that could be implemented to make access to mental health care easy and affordable. Although the focus areas and plans varied across each candidate's statement, they all expressed support to further improve the system. (Kennedy)

The mental health care crisis in the United States of America is a topic that is increasingly being acknowledged by a large array of organizations. Despite this, access to

treatments being controlled by the government and insurers are not being supported, ultimately affecting the lives of millions of Americans each year. Untreated mental illnesses can severely affect their livelihood and lifestyle, which could potentially introduce them to other fatal disorders. This crisis needs to continue to be properly addressed in the next upcoming election and worked on to improve the overall standard of living for suffering Americans. The neglect needs to stop; change needs to happen.

Works Cited

Ellis, Mary Ellen. "The Real Cost of Untreated Mental Illness in America." *Constellation Behavioral Health*, Constellation Behavioral Health, 27 Mar. 2019, <https://www.constellationbehavioralhealth.com/blog/the-real-cost-of-untreated-mental-illness-in-america/>.

Gruber, June, and Darby Saxbe. "Five Improvements We Should Make to Mental Health Care"

Slate Magazine, Slate, 27 Feb. 2018,

<https://slate.com/technology/2018/02/how-to-fix-americas-broken-mental-health-care-system.html>.

"Health Reform and Mental Illness." *NAMI*,

[https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Get-Involved/NAMI-National-Convention/Convention-Program-Schedule/Hill-Day-2017/FINAL-Hill-Day-17-Leave-Behind-all-\(1\).pdf](https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Get-Involved/NAMI-National-Convention/Convention-Program-Schedule/Hill-Day-2017/FINAL-Hill-Day-17-Leave-Behind-all-(1).pdf).

Kennedy, P. J., Smith, G. H., Kennedy, P. J., Smith, G. H., Kennedy, P. J., Smith, G. H., ... Lrh.

(2019, September 12). 2020 candidates weigh in on our countrys mental health, addiction crises. Retrieved from

<https://www.statnews.com/2019/09/12/presidential-candidates-weigh-in-mental-health-addiction-crises/>.

"Mental Health Care By The Numbers." *NAMI*, <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-by-the-numbers>.

"New Study Reveals Lack of Access as Root Cause for Mental Health Crisis in America."

National Council,

<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/new-study-reveals-lack-of-access-as-root-cause-for-mental-health-crisis-in-america/>.

National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Part 1: The Connection Between Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illness." *NIDA*,

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/part-1-connection-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illness>.

"What's the Answer to the Shortage of Mental Health Care Providers?" *U.S. News & World*

Report, U.S. News & World Report,

<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/2018-05-25/whats-the-answer-to-the-shortage-of-mental-health-care-providers>.