

## Health Equity Demands Improved Access and Better Treatment

The past decade has seen a growing national crisis stemming from inadequate mental health and substance use care, with record levels of suicide and drug-related deaths. While higher paid Americans can generally access care, all others face huge ó often insurmountable ó challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic has created an even greater mental health crisis.

Employers and unions identify the need to improve access to effective, affordable, and timely behavioral healthcare as a top priority. **Five evidence-based reforms exist to dramatically improve early detection and access to behavioral healthcare.** Implementation of these reforms is the centerpiece of the Path Forward:

1. **Improve in-network access to behavioral health specialists:** Inadequate or óphantomö networks lead to a false sense of access for lower paid workers and a two-tiered system.
2. **Expand screening and testing for MHSUD:** Evidence clearly shows that consistent use of MHSUD symptom measurement tools (questionnaires) reduces disparities in diagnosis and improves outcomes by a remarkable 20% - 60%.
3. **Rapidly expand integration of behavioral health into primary care:** The öCollaborative Care Modelö (CoCM) is a well-defined, proven and scalable solution that delivers improved access and outcomes for all Americans by integrating the support of psychiatrists (virtually) and MHSUD care managers into primary care.
4. **Improve tele-behavioral health:** Tele-behavioral health has grown dramatically since the onset of Covid-19 as barriers to implementation have been addressed overnight. These gains must be locked in for the long term while standards are established and raised to support diverse populations with disparate needs, capabilities, and access to technology.
5. **Ensure mental health parity compliance.** Parity must go beyond quantitative limits and now encompass the önon-quantifiable treatment limitationsö and practices that impact disparities in both access and performance.

These reforms have gained endorsements from accrediting bodies, provider groups, and payers, but have not been broadly implemented. The Path Forward uses a **market-driven approach** to drive improvements in these five areas by leveraging the öpurchaserö influence of regional coalitions of employers and unions.

Advancing a single strategy will not solve this crisis but advancing the five reforms of The Path Forward together will go a long way to executing a more holistic solution to complex dynamics. By engaging and holding accountable all key stakeholders in a disciplined change process, **The Path Forward constitutes our nation’s most innovative and best opportunity to transform behavioral healthcare at a population level to the benefit of all Americans.**

### THE PATH FORWARD NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychiatric Association Foundation

Bowman Family Foundation

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

### THE PATH FORWARD RESET REGIONS AND COALITIONS

#### California

Pacific Business Group on Health  
Silicon Valley Employers Forum

#### Florida

Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value

#### Kansas

Kansas Business Group on Health

#### Maryland, DC & No Virginia

MidAtlantic Business Group on Health

#### Minnesota

Minnesota Health Action Group

#### NYC metro area including No

New Jersey & So Connecticut  
Northeast Business Group on Health

#### Tennessee

Memphis Business Group on Health  
HealthCare 21 Business Coalition

#### Texas

Dallas Fort Worth Business Group on Health  
Houston Business Coalition on Health