

Media Tip Sheet for Reporting on *Pain in the Nation: The Drug, Alcohol, and Suicide Crises and the Need for a National Resilience Strategy*

There are myriad media angles related to this report. Below, we identify highlights to spark ideas about how media may cover this story in ways that their audiences will find compelling.

The Current Crisis and Future Projections

- More than 1 million Americans died from drug overdoses, alcohol abuse and suicide between 2006 and 2015.
- Life expectancy has decreased for the first time in two decades, in part due to these public health crises.
- In 2015 alone, 127,500 Americans died from drug- or alcohol-induced deaths or suicide. That's 350 deaths per day, 14 per hour and one every four minutes from these causes.
- If these trends continue, these three epidemics are expected to result in more than 1.6 million deaths by 2025—that's a 60 percent increase over current levels.

These data—while news on their own—invite closer inspection of:

- The underlying drivers of these issues and the human scale of their impacts
- The evidence-based policies, programs and practices that could dampen these projections
- Practical approaches for enhancing mental health and wellness at the individual and community levels

See below for some timely news hooks to guide story ideation.

Holidays, Mental Health and Substance Use

This is the season for spending time with friends and loved ones. Whereas for some, these moments are healing, for many others, they spur conflict and in some cases trauma.

How can you support loved ones over the holidays? How can you safely start conversations about what matters most to you?

Economic Costs of a Nation in Crisis

Health care spending for an individual who has a diagnosis related to drugs or alcohol and one at risk for suicide are 2.5 times higher than for the average American adult, averaging \$20,113 per patient per year. This equates to \$249 billion—roughly 9.5 percent of total health expenditures in the United States. With 18 percent of our GDP going to health care, what are we getting for that investment?

How can health care systems both save lives and save costs through early intervention and holistic treatment of a person's whole health?

Addressing Underlying Causes of Despair Deaths

Without addressing underlying causes—such as mental health issues, substance use disorders, chronic pain, adverse childhood experiences and prolonged stress—we will fail to slow down, much less turn around, the projected growth of “despair deaths.”

*How can we work upstream by addressing issues before they grow into crises?
What are the roles of providers, schools, communities, health systems and payers in this transformation?
Where are there examples of heroes in our health system who are working upstream to address the underlying drivers of disease and pain?*

Aligning a Fragmented Health Care System

Our health care delivery system reinforces a false notion that mental health is separate from physical health. We further this fragmentation through how we construe care, including how we pay for, deliver, train for and establish policies for that care. New approaches are emerging for integrating mental health with critical delivery settings like primary care, and they show promise to model the way for more comprehensive, person-centered, integrated approaches to promoting well-being. This type of disruption is needed to retool mental health nationwide.

What do these approaches look like on the ground (from practitioner and patient perspectives)? And how could we scale up such approaches? What investment and policy strategies could create the enabling environment for more holistic approaches to health and well-being?

**To arrange for an interview, please contact
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