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

Mental health services in the U.S. are insufficient despite more than half of Americans (56%) seeking help

Limited options and long waits are the norm, but some bright spots with 76% of Americans now seeing mental health as important as physical health

Washington, D.C. – October 10, 2018 – Today, Cohen Veterans Network (CVN), a national not-for-profit philanthropic organization, and National Council for Behavioral Health, the unifying voice of America’s health care organizations that delivers mental health and addiction treatment and services, issued the inaugural America’s Mental Health 2018, a comprehensive study of access to mental health care, at the 2018 Cohen Veterans Care Summit in Washington D.C. The study, which assesses Americans’ current access to and attitudes towards mental health services, revealed American mental health services are insufficient, and despite high demand, the root of the problem is lack of access – or the ability to find care.

The study offers a comprehensive analysis of the state of mental health care in the U.S. It is comprised of a two-pronged research project that includes an online survey of 5,000 American adults, and a robust analysis of third-party data measuring patients’ access to mental health services in terms of four pillars – providers, facilities, funding and perceived satisfaction among patients.

“There is a mental health crisis in America. My experience establishing mental health clinics across the country, coupled with this study, shows that more needs to be done to give Americans much needed access to mental health services,” said Cohen Veterans Network President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Anthony Hassan. “If we want to save lives, save families and save futures we must reimagine our behavioral health system and take concrete steps to improving consumers’ ability to find the care they need, when they need it, and on their terms.”

Despite Strong Demand for Mental Health Services, Common Barriers Remain

The demand for mental health services is stronger than ever, with nearly six in 10 (56%) Americans seeking or wanting to seek mental health services either for themselves or for a loved one. These individuals are skewing younger and are more likely to be of lower income and have a military background. The large majority of Americans (76%) also believe mental health is just as important as physical health.

“This study confirmed what we hear from our members every day, that individuals and families continue to struggle to find the help they desperately need,” said Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of National Council for Behavioral Health. “Mental health and addiction providers need adequate funding to hire skilled staff, employ evidence-based practices and adopt innovative technologies – all of which will help us meet demand.”

Despite this strong demand and growing societal awareness of the importance of mental health in the U.S., the study revealed that the overwhelming majority of Americans (74%) do not believe such services are accessible for everyone, and about half (47%) believe options are limited.

These beliefs are driven by several perceived barriers in Americans’ ability to seek mental health treatment, including:

- **High Cost and Insufficient Insurance Coverage:** Forty-two percent of the population saw cost and poor insurance coverage as the top barriers for accessing mental health care. One in four (25%) Americans reported having to choose between getting mental health treatment and paying for daily necessities.

Several individuals blamed the U.S. government and insurers for not providing enough funding and support for access. Nearly one in five of Americans, or 17%, noted they have had to choose between getting treatment for a physical health condition and a mental health condition due to their insurance policy. The majority (64%) of Americans who have sought treatment believe the U.S. government needs to do more to improve mental health services.

- **Limited Options and Long Waits:** Access to face-to-face services is a higher priority for Americans seeking mental health treatment than access to medication. Ninety-six million Americans, or 38%, have had to wait longer than one week for mental health treatments. And nearly half of Americans, or 46%, have had to or know someone who has had to drive more than an hour roundtrip to seek treatment.

While most Americans have heard of telehealth as an option for treating mental health issues, only 7% have reported using it. When asked if they would be open to using it, almost half, or 45%, of Americans who have not already tried telehealth services said they would be open to the idea of trying a service to address a current or future mental health need.

- **Lack of Awareness:** While most Americans do try to seek out treatment, there also is a large portion of the population who have wanted to but did not seek treatment for themselves or loved ones (29%) in part due to not knowing where to go if they needed this service. What’s more, fifty-three million American adults (21%) have wanted to see a professional but were unable to for reasons outside of their control.

Furthermore, younger Americans (i.e., Gen Z and Millennials) are less sure about resources for mental health services, compared to older generations. This younger generation was also more likely to find it

too hard to figure out legitimate resources online. Instead, many turned to unreliable resources for information, including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

- **Social Stigma:** Nearly one-third of Americans, or 31%, have worried about others judging them when they told them they have sought mental health services, and over a fifth of the population, or 21%, have even lied to avoid telling people they were seeking mental health services. This stigma is particularly true for younger Americans, who are more likely to have worried about others judging them when they say they have sought mental health services (i.e. 49% Gen Z vs. 40% Millennials vs. 30% Gen X vs. 20% Boomers).

Stark Disparities in Accessibility at State and Income Levels

Based on the analysis of third-party data, states are struggling to keep up with demand due to lack of funding and facilities, and, to a lesser extent, providers. Texas, Wisconsin and Georgia ranked among the lowest in terms of lacking adequate number of providers, facilities and funding to support the states' populations. Pennsylvania, New York and Minnesota ranked among the top.

There is also a large disparity in access to mental health care based on level of income and location. Individuals located in rural areas and of lower-income are less likely to say that mental health services are extremely accessible to them.

Compared to middle- and high-income households, low-income Americans are less likely to know where to go for treatment and more likely to use a community center versus a qualified mental health center. Of the Americans that have not sought mental health treatment, more than half, or 53%, were in low-income households.

In addition, compared to Americans living in urban and suburban areas, individuals living in rural areas are less likely to proactively seek mental health specialists they need, and instead go to their primary care doctor or community center for treatment. Rural Americans are also less accepting of mental health services and care.

The Path Forward

The Cohen Veterans Network and National Council for Behavioral Health believe that more must be done to improve access to care for everyday Americans. Specifically, younger Americans need more information on how and where to access care and need to understand that treatments are effective. We also need to improve the understanding of the real cost of delivering mental health care and move reimbursement levels to parity with physical health care. Finally, new models should be explored, including philanthropy, such as Cohen Veterans Network, and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) as well as community programs like Mental Health First Aid. For more information on the study results and how CVN and National Council are working to address mental wellness and accessibility across the country, please visit www.cohenveteransnetwork.org/AmericasMentalHealth or www.TheNationalCouncil.org.

About America's Mental Health 2018

Cohen Veterans Network and National Council for Behavioral Health partnered with Ketchum Analytics who conducted an online survey among 5,000 Americans, representative of the U.S. population based on age, gender, region, household income and race/ethnicity. The survey was conducted between July 31 – August 12, 2018, with a margin of error of +/- 1.38 at the 95% confidence level. Through the survey, the following groups were identified: veterans, active duty military and those with a secondary relationship with a veteran as well as those who have sought mental health treatment (Mental Health Treatment Seekers). A custom index was developed, ranking each state according to its mental health service access. Third-party data was gathered to determine access based on four pillars: providers, facilities, funding and satisfaction. Data was aggregated and averaged to each state, resulting in a score between 0 and 100, where 100 indicates the greatest access.

About Cohen Veterans Network

The Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) is a 501(c)(3) national not-for-profit philanthropic organization for post-9/11 veterans and their families. CVN focuses on improving mental health outcomes, with a goal to build a network of outpatient mental health clinics for veterans and their families in high-need communities, in which trained clinicians deliver holistic evidence-based care to treat mental health conditions. There are currently 10 Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics nationwide.

About National Council for Behavioral Health

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America's health care organizations that deliver mental health and addictions treatment and services. Together with our 2,900-member organizations serving over 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery. The National Council introduced Mental Health First Aid USA and more than one million Americans have been trained. For more information, please visit www.TheNationalCouncil.org.

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