

Mental health and substance use problems continue to negatively impact our productivity as a nation. Mental health drives wellness. Sound mental health provides the stable foundation upon which a person can build, in partnership with providers of care as needed, their own long-term physical health and well-being. This in turn leads to healthy communities which meaningfully contribute to society.

### **Burden of Mental Health Problems under Current System**

- Approximately 56 million of American adults experience mental illness and/or a substance use disorder in a given year.<sup>1</sup>
- 75% of chronic mental health conditions begin by age 24, yet the delay between the first appearance of symptoms and intervention is an average of almost a decade.<sup>2</sup>
- Persons living with serious mental illness die on average 25 years sooner than the rest of the American population, in large part due to treatable medical conditions.<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 46% of homeless adults staying in shelters live with severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders and about 20% of state prisoners have a recent history of a mental health condition.<sup>4</sup>
- Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year.<sup>4</sup>
- Currently one third of Medicaid recipients have a mental health or substance use disorder.<sup>5</sup>

### **APNA Position: Whole Health Begins with Mental Health**

The American Psychiatric Nurses Association, an organization representing all levels of psychiatric-mental health nursing, asserts that **whole health begins with mental health**. APNA takes the position that mental health promotion, through prevention, recognition and adequate care and treatment, must be at the starting point of and comprehensively woven throughout the delivery of services within the American health care system. Further, our definition of health must be transformed to one which recognizes mental health as foundational for all health.

This position is supported by the following points:

- Health is a “state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of a disease or infirmity”<sup>6</sup>
- There is a broad consensus amongst experts in health care that transforming America’s system to a proactive one that promotes health and wellness, rather than reactively treating illness, is a necessity.<sup>7</sup>
- Mental illnesses are risk factors that affect the incidence and prognosis of ‘noncommunicable’ diseases and addressing mental illnesses delays progression, improves survival outcomes, and reduces health care costs associated with noncommunicable diseases.<sup>8</sup>
- Research shows a strong link between adverse childhood experiences and long-term negative health and well-being outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

### **Recommendations for the Future**

- Health care systems should be structured to address mental health and substance use both at the first point of contact as well as throughout the patient’s journey within the system.
- All providers should have facility with mental health and substance use screenings to allow for prevention, early identification, brief intervention, and referral to treatment.
- National, state, and local policies and regulations must ensure universal access to affordable services that promote mental health, prevent mental illness and substance use disorders, and offer care and treatment as necessary, which are provided by qualified health care professionals.

### **Conclusion**

A successful and healthy society depends upon the mental health of its constituents. As it stands now, the prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorders continues to exact a toll across our communities. National, state, and local policies and regulations must take immediate action to ensure that policies are put into place which promote a proactive approach to wellness. The American Psychiatric Nurses Association believes that this proactive approach must recognize that mental health serves as the foundation for overall health and therefore mental health and substance use services must be affordable, accessible, and integrated throughout the continuum of care.

*Approved by the APNA Board of Directors March 14, 2017.*

# APNA POSITION STATEMENT

## Whole Health Begins With Mental Health

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