

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: We Are Inseparable.

America was in a spiraling mental health crisis well before the COVID pandemic hit. The events of the last year only compounded the issue, causing the country's mental health to rapidly degrade.

Right now, more than 26 million individuals are experiencing a mental health illness that is going untreated ([state-by-state data](#)) and every day there are an average of over 3,703 suicide attempts by young people in grades 9-12.

Communities of color have been disproportionately impacted too. In [states](#) and cities across the country, the number of suicide deaths among Black residents has doubled in just three short years. An analysis found that the suicide rate for Black populations in 2018 was approximately half of the gross total, and those living with racial trauma today are now experiencing additional psychological and physiological effects from the pandemic and the mental health epidemic occurring within it.

The bottom line is this: People are suffering in every community.

[Inseparable](#) is a new advocacy organization working to reverse this collapse. We are a growing coalition of people from across the country who share a common goal to fundamentally improve mental healthcare policy to heal ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities. We are coming together as a united force to press our leaders to recognize, with both policy and tangible solutions, that the health of our minds cannot be separated from the health of our bodies. We are Inseparable.

In 2021, Inseparable has identified three urgent policy areas where we believe substantial reforms at the federal and state levels can be made in the near-term: increasing access to care; investing in prevention and early intervention; and stopping the criminalization of mental illness.

HERE IS HOW WE DO IT

- **Eliminate the treatment gap between the number of people who need help and the people who are getting it. It's time to expand and integrate services, not contract them.** State legislatures should:
 - Expand and make treatment via telehealth permanent so that rural communities have the same access to mental health care as urban centers.
 - Enact the [Jim Ramstad Model Parity Policy](#) to require that all insurers follow generally accepted standards of mental health care.
- **Ensure every school has the supports and services necessary to promote a healthy school climate, social and emotional learning, and mental health and well-being for students, teachers, and staff.** State legislatures should:
 - Advance policies in alignment with Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS), including provision of essential services like mental health screening, resource sharing, training, and by equipping educators and staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to best support the needs of students.
 - Require that health education in schools includes age-appropriate mental health education. For example, the Arizona State Legislature is currently considering [senate bill 1376](#), which would require schools to have mental health instruction in the curriculum.
- **Stop criminalizing mental illness.** State legislatures should:
 - Support a timely and well-resourced nationwide rollout of the new mental health crisis hotline 988 by securing sufficient dedicated funds for crisis centers, services, and additional mental health workforce at the state-level.

- Expand crisis response and include coverage of community-based mobile crisis intervention services for individuals experiencing a mental health or substance-use disorder crisis outside of a facility setting.

Together, we can put these policies in place and make sure people get the help they need. Inseparable is here to be a resource for you and your colleagues, and we look forward to partnering to reverse this crisis.

If you are interested in advancing any of these priorities in 2021, contact me at bill@inseparable.us.

Let's save lives together,

Bill Smith, Founder, Inseparable, and Dr. Benjamin F. Miller, Chief Strategy Officer, Well Being Trust

Resources:

- [New Model State Parity Legislation Named in Honor of Former U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad](#)
- [Generally Accepted Standards of Care](#)
- [Arizona Playbook: Ensuring People Can Get the Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Care They Need](#)
- [Landmark Decision: UnitedHealthcare Used Defective Criteria to Reject Coverage of Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Services, Federal Court Finds](#)
- [Healing Our Nation: State-Based Solutions for Connecting People to Mental Health Care and Addiction Recovery Services](#)
- [NY and CA Actions Put Health Plans on Notice](#)
- [A solutions guide for every level of society to improve mental health outcomes and promote well-being for millions of Americans.](#)
- [Issue brief: States must take action to enforce mental health and substance use disorder parity... Adopt model legislation that holds payers accountable](#)