



**TO: INTERESTED PARTIES**  
**FROM: ELIZABETH HARRINGTON, PARTNER – PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES**  
**RE: KENNEDY FORUM NATIONAL TELEPHONE SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS**  
**DATE: JANUARY 29, 2015**

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**KEY FINDINGS:**

**Nearly all Americans (96%) believe that mental health conditions are a serious public health problem in the United States today. Two-thirds (66%) believe mental health conditions are a “very serious” public health problem.**

- Respondents were asked: “How serious of a public health problem do you think mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, alcohol or drug abuse are in the United States today...very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?”

66% Very Serious  
30% Somewhat Serious  
3% Not Too Serious  
1% Not At All Serious

- Majorities of Republicans (59%), Independents (63%), and Democrats (73%) think mental health conditions are a “very serious” public health problem.
- Both women and men believe mental health conditions are a “very serious” public health problem, though women (74%) are more concerned than men (57%).

**More than seven in ten Americans (74%) believe that physical health is treated with greater importance than mental health in our current health care system.**

- Respondents were asked: “Do you think that mental health and physical health are treated with equal importance in our current health care system?” Respondents who said “no” were asked to specify which they felt was treated with more importance.

16% Yes, Mental and physical health are treated with equal importance  
74% No, Physical health is treated with more importance  
6% No, Mental health is treated with more importance  
4% Don’t Know

**The majority of Americans support (71%) making “radical” or “significant” changes to the way we are handling mental health conditions in the United States today.**

- Respondents were asked: “Overall, do you think the current way we are handling mental health conditions in this country needs...a radical change, a significant change, some change, only minor change, or no change?”

28%	Radical Change
43%	Significant Change
22%	Some Change
5%	Only Minor Change
2%	No Change

- Republicans (64%), Independents (71%), and Democrats (76%) are in agreement about the need for “radical” or “significant” change to the way we are handling mental health conditions today.
- We asked respondents who support changing the way we are handling mental health conditions the following open-ended question: “Please tell me some of the reasons why you said the current way we are handling mental health conditions in this country needs (inserted response - radical, significant, or some change). What specifically do you think needs to change?”
  - The main reason respondents say they support changes to the way we are handling mental health conditions is that they believe there are not enough adequate treatment options available today. They suggest increasing funding for mental health and increasing the number of facilities able to handle mental health patients so treatment is made available to everyone who needs it. In addition, they also suggest expanding education of health care professionals about mental health which may lead to more accurate and earlier diagnoses.
  - Respondents also mention the need to better address the mental health conditions of our veterans, making sure they receive adequate treatment.
  - Some respondents also mention the need to address and talk about drug and alcohol addiction as part of mental health.
  - There is a concern among these respondents that mental health is stigmatized in our society today so people who need help do not seek out the treatment they need. They feel there is a need to combat the stigma and educate the public on the seriousness of mental health conditions.

**Respondents were presented with five possible goals for mental health in the United States. All five of the goals we tested are viewed as being important. Ensuring access to care and improving quality of care for people with mental health conditions were viewed as the most important.**

- Respondents were read five possible goals for mental health in this country. They were asked to indicate how high of a priority they felt each goal should be using a zero to ten scale, where “ten” means it should be the single most important goal, a “zero” means it should not be an important goal, and “five” is in the middle. Respondents could use any number between zero and ten depending on how they felt. The table on the following page shows the average mean rating and the percentage of respondents rating an 8-10 for each mental health goal.

<b>Mental Health Goals Tested</b>	<b>% Rating 8-10</b>	<b>Average Mean Rating</b>
Making sure people with mental health conditions have access to the care they need regardless of where they live, their ethnicity, or their background	80%	8.7
Improving the quality of care for people with mental health conditions	70%	8.1
Conducting research to find new ways to treat mental health conditions	63%	7.9
Conducting research to better determine the causes of mental health conditions	61%	7.7
Finding ways to prevent mental health conditions	60%	7.7

**More than one-third of Americans (37%) report being affected by mental health conditions, either themselves or someone in their household.**

- Respondents were asked: “have you or has anyone else in your household ever received counseling, been hospitalized, or taken prescription medicine for treatment of a mental health condition?”

10% Yes, Self  
16% Yes, Household Member  
11% Yes, Self and Household Member  
60% No  
3% Refused (volunteered response)

**There is confusion over whether or not current law provides parity of coverage for mental health benefits.**

- Respondents were asked: “As far as you know, under current law, are health insurance plans required to provide mental health benefits with the same rules about co-pays, deductibles, and coverage limits as other medical services?”

34% Yes  
28% No  
38% Don’t Know (volunteered response)

**METHODOLOGY:**

Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national telephone survey of N=800 registered voters (land lines + cells). The survey was conducted from January 14-18, 2015. The margin of error for this survey is +3.46%.