



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 3, 2015

**CONTACT:**

Paul Quirk (202) 549-5394

Ronna Nu'man (404) 752-1717

## **Poll: 71% of Americans Call for 'Significant' or 'Radical' Changes in Way Mental Health and Addiction are Treated**

*Research Comes as Patrick J. Kennedy and Dr. David Satcher Join Forces, Announce New Center for Mental Health Policy and Research to Tackle Critical Needs*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Nearly all Americans believe the state of mental health and addiction in the United States is a serious problem, and seventy-one percent (71%) believe it requires “significant” or “radical” changes, according to new public opinion research released today.

The new research comes as former U.S. Representative Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.) and Dr. David Satcher, former Surgeon General, announced the formation of the **Kennedy Center for Mental Health Policy and Research** at an event in Washington, D.C. The Center will be housed within the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia.

The new partnership and Center, unveiled as part of the first annual State of the Union in Mental Health and Addiction, will focus on highlighting, expanding, and promoting best practices in mental health and addiction treatment and policy. Both Mr. Kennedy and Dr. Satcher hope to make significant progress toward solving a range of challenges in mental health and substance use disorders through the Center's work.

“Dr. Satcher and I agree that the state of mental health and addictions in America is challenging for our citizens, and we need significant change,” said Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum. “We are optimistic that by working together, we can make take the necessary actions to ensure that we are living up to the letter, and spirit, of the 2008 parity law, which guarantees equality for people seeking services.”

The public opinion research, commissioned by the new Center and conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, reveals seventy-four percent (74%) of Americans believe physical health is “treated with more importance” in the healthcare system. Addressing this issue is a goal the partnership outlined as part of the announcement.

“Fifteen years ago, I released the first-ever report to the nation on mental health, and we found that mental health conditions affect far more people than we had once thought,” said Dr. David Satcher, director of the Morehouse School of Medicine Satcher Health Leadership Institute (SHLI). “Have we made progress? The jury is still out. But what we do know is that more needs to be done to innovate and collaborate, and the Kennedy Center for Mental Health Policy and Research will help lead the way.”

The poll also points to:

- **Broad, bi-partisan support for action** on mental health issues.
- **A clear majority of those surveyed believing that quality of and access to mental health care needs to be top priorities**, stating the two most important goals for mental health in the United States are “improving quality of care for people with mental health conditions” and “making sure people with mental health conditions have access to the care they need regardless of where they live, their ethnicity, or their background.”

- **The need for better research into the causes, treatment and prevention of mental health conditions**, such as depression, anxiety, alcohol, and drug abuse.

“With so many Americans ready for a change in our approach to mental health and addictions, the Center will provide needed guidance and a range of resources,” said William Emmet, executive director of The Kennedy Forum. “These types of partnerships are critical in raising key issues, and fostering the collaboration we need to solve them.”

Together, The Kennedy Forum, the Satcher Health Leadership Institute, and the Center will turn their attention to addressing a handful of issues critical to the future of mental health and addiction in the United States. These include:

- **Quality**, with a focus on provider accountability and outcomes and the need to set clear and achievable standards that all providers can adopt and use.
- **Innovation**, with a focus on cutting-edge technology, ongoing research, and leveraging the promise of big data.
- **Equity**, with a redoubling of efforts to end disparities, fully implement parity, and support justice system reforms.
- **Integration**, with an emphasis on caring for the whole person, and ensuring that all Americans can get a “checkup from the neck up.”

“Our mandate is clear, and the stakes for millions of Americans are too big to ignore,” said Dr. Valerie Montgomery Rice, President and Dean of Morehouse School of Medicine. “MSM and The Kennedy Forum are determined to use this partnership as a way to elevate the issues that will have an impact on quality, innovation, and health equity. With more than a third of Americans unsure if their insurance covers mental health under the same rules as other medical conditions, the work of the Center couldn’t be more necessary or critical.”

###

**A webcast of the announcement and discussion is available at:**

[www.thekennedyforum.org/SOTU](http://www.thekennedyforum.org/SOTU)

#### **About the Kennedy Center for Mental Health Policy and Research**

The \$5 million Kennedy Center for Mental Health Policy and Research was created with equal endowments from The Kennedy Forum and a Morehouse School of Medicine grant from the National Institutes of Health. The Center will be housed at the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia, and will be led by Drs. Glenda Wrenn, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health and Harry J. Heiman, Director of the Division of Health Policy at SHLI.

#### **About the Kennedy Forum**

The Kennedy Forum seeks to unite the health care system, and rally the mental health community around a common set of principles: Fully implement the 2008 parity law, bring business leaders and government agencies together to eliminate issues of stigma, work with providers to guarantee equal access to care, ensure that policymakers have the tools they need to craft better policy, and give consumers a way to understand their rights. For more information visit: [www.thekennedyforum.org](http://www.thekennedyforum.org)

#### **About the Morehouse School of Medicine**

Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of individuals and communities; increasing the diversity of the professional and scientific workforce; and addressing primary healthcare needs through programs in education, research, and service with emphasis on people of color and the underserved urban and rural populations in Georgia and the nation. For more information visit: [www.msm.edu](http://www.msm.edu)