

DETERMINATION



MEADOWS
MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY INSTITUTE

Transforming mental health systems requires dedication, expertise, and, MORE THAN ANYTHING...

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Our History, Mission, and Vision

The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute provides independent, nonpartisan, data-driven, and trusted policy and program guidance that creates equitable systemic changes so all Texans can obtain effective, efficient behavioral health care when and where they need it.

The Meadows Institute grew out of The Meadows Foundation's unyielding concern for the people of Texas. In 2014, The Meadows Foundation established the Institute as an independent nonprofit organization. A few years later in 2018, through a transformational gift from Maureen and Jim Hackett, the Meadows Institute created The Hackett Center for Mental Health in Houston as its first regional center.

With offices in Austin, Dallas–Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio, and projects in every region of our state, the Meadows Institute has become Texas's most trusted source for results-oriented data and analysis of effective, efficient, and equitable policy and programs. We are also now growing that trust nationally to address the troubling mental health and substance use challenges that COVID-19 laid bare across both our state and our country.

We work at the national, state, regional, and local levels to help mental health and substance use treatment systems improve, share best practices, develop resources, and increase public awareness on the most effective ways to treat mental illness and addiction and help people recover. The Meadows Institute's vision is for Texas to be the leader in helping our state and nation meet the needs of all people with mental health and addiction challenges.

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Message from Chair O’Neill



LEADER
SHIP

No matter who you are or where you live, COVID-19 has impacted your life to one degree or another. No one has been left untouched.

Older adults and others most susceptible to COVID-19 spent long months isolated, and many remain so. Families have grieved as loved ones succumbed, unable to gather and remember together or share their pain. When the economy effectively shut down, fellow Texans struggled to find work, feed their families, access health care, and engage in the sorts of activities that sustain us. Our children not only absorbed such family stress, but also struggled to learn in strange and unfamiliar ways while largely isolated from the company of school friends.

And 2021 kept the stresses coming, adding in an unprecedented freeze that wreaked widespread devastation, contributing to a perfect storm for a level of stress and anxiety that is off the charts in depth and in duration. Thankfully, Texans refuse to be stuck in neutral. While the pandemic’s sheer magnitude surpassed anything that could have been foreseen or prepared for, Texas was both better positioned to provide help and more aware of just how important mental health truly is.

We saw Governor Abbott expand the delivery of health care – and yes, that includes mental health care – via telehealth. We saw implementation of the ground-breaking Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), a crucial source of support for pediatricians and other primary-care providers who have young patients with mental health needs. Underpinning this was a change that has less to do with any specific program than with the state’s fundamental perception of mental health. Rather than viewing mental health care as expendable

during tough economic times, it was correctly viewed as absolutely essential. Indeed, when the Texas Legislature first mandated across-the-board cuts to state spending in the wake of the pandemic-driven economic downturn, it explicitly carved out exceptions for mental health care funding.

Through it all, the Meadows Institute worked with policymakers, providers, funders, and other groups to ensure they had expert counsel as they adapted to ever-changing state and federal regulations and guidance. Blessed with an inspiring leader, super-talented staff, and an energetic Board, we drove the state and national conversation of a crisis-within-a-crisis by modeling the potential effects the slowing economy could have on suicide and substance abuse rates. Through Okay to Say™, we reached out to people who were directly affected, helping them share their feelings, find ways to connect, and take steps to not just weather the pandemic, but to thrive.

Of course, we have a long way to go. But years of hard work by determined people all across Texas paid off in 2020. The Meadows Institute has played a key part, and for that we are exceedingly proud. The pandemic and its mental health repercussions are far from over – we have years of recovery before us from its emotional tolls. But because we no longer have to convince people that there is a mental health crisis, we are much closer than ever before to truly making Texas a national leader in providing the mental health care needed to address it. Onward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harriet O'Neill".

Harriet O’Neill
Chair, MMHPI Board of Directors,
October 2019—Present

Message from ANDY KELLER

If you're going to solve a problem, the first thing you have to do is look it squarely in the face. For all of us, 2020 was a long, hard look at the face of what is ailing our society, both figuratively and literally.

The COVID-19 pandemic shined a bright spotlight on our shortcomings in terms of health care, most particularly the vast inequities within our systems. We saw the huge differences in the way the pandemic, including the virus itself, affected specific populations and communities. Mortality rates were different, unemployment rates were different, and even the ability of

forcing our country to take stock of where we were and where we were going.

The issues surrounding the policing of American cities are vast and complicated. In general, police officers live and work in a state of constant stress; it's no accident that more officers die from suicide than are killed in the line of duty. And those same stresses can contribute to overuse of force. We need to find solutions that address all of these issues, and a common pathway across all of these ugly realities is emotional wellness and healing from toxic stress, trauma, and grief. The last

“We are having important and long-overdue conversations. Above all, MANY OF US ARE LOOKING FOR WORKABLE SOLUTIONS.”



our children to attend school virtually was different.

It was a vivid reminder that we have a long way to go to achieve the sort of health outcomes we desire for every Texan. However, although it may have affected us all differently, make no mistake, it affected us all. Even those spared by the virus experienced extended periods of stress, isolation, and uncertainty on an unprecedented scale. The degree of grief and trauma inflicted across so many will affect us all for years to come. And that was not the only ugly reality America confronted in 2020.

The murder of Texas native George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis sparked a national response that placed, front and center, racial injustices that date back centuries. The tragic loss of Mr. Floyd exposed an underlying reality,

year also brought bright spots in the turmoil. One positive is that we are having important and long-overdue conversations. Most of us are open to new ideas and, most importantly, many of us are looking for workable solutions.

Another positive is that, in a single year, America showed the world how to detect, treat, and prevent a disease we had never before seen. This suggests an additional hope for the coming year. Namely, that it should be much easier to scale similar solutions for the long-standing scourges of mental illness and addiction, conditions we already know how to successfully detect and treat.

Andy Keller, Ph.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Linda Perryman Evans Presidential Chair

YEAR IN REVIEW

- The **Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium** brought all 12 publicly-funded Texas medical schools together to help Texas children and families.
- The Institute joined **14 leading national mental health voices** to drive innovation and advocacy efforts across the U.S.
- Hundreds of Texas providers received weekly **regulatory and reimbursement provider newsletters** to guide them through COVID-related telehealth and reimbursement changes.
- The **Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN)** and Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) were launched.
- Over 4,000 Texas Girl Scouts earned the **Okay to Say™ mental health patch**.
- The **Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center** joined The Hackett Center for Mental Health.
- The Meadows Board embedded **health equity within our mission, vision, and strategic priorities**.
- **RIGHT Care** changed the national conversation on health-driven responses to mental health emergencies.
- A Unified Vision for **Transforming Mental Health & Substance Use Care** is released by the Institute and our national partners.

2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges. A global pandemic tested our resolve, and a national reckoning on race made us reevaluate how health and justice intersect.

January

- The Legislative Budget Board officially **approved implementation of the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium**, created by the 86th Legislature.

- **Andy Keller**, Institute President and CEO, **spoke to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce** in Washington, D.C., about The Path Forward for **achieving real parity for mental health and substance use disorders**.

- The Supreme Court of Texas **appointed Gary Blau**, Hackett Center Executive Director, **as Commissioner on the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families**.

- The Institute **submitted its final report to the W. W. Caruth, Jr. Foundation** at the Communities Foundation of Texas on the Caruth Smart Justice Project, **highlighting transformational work in Dallas through RIGHT Care** and related reforms to change the default response to mental health emergencies from law enforcement officers to health professionals.

February

- **Okay to Say** **starred in a pre-game mental health fair** and at halftime of the San Antonio Spurs' first-ever Mental Health Awareness Night.

- **B.J. Wagner**, Senior Fellow of Justice System Policy, **appeared on a national news network to discuss the tragedy**

of police officer suicide and the efforts Texas is making to eliminate it.

March

- The Institute held its last in-person meeting of the year on March 10 with its Board in San Antonio for a briefing, presented by partners from the **Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council** and **City of San Antonio Public Health**, on **how the region was managing the first COVID-19 cases** in Texas at **Lackland Air Force Base**.

- On March 13, Institute leadership implemented a **fully remote workplace** and **canceled all travel and in-person meetings**, quickly **shifting the Institute's focus to helping frontline health care workers** as well as **analyzing and addressing pandemic-related mental health issues**, shifts that continued into 2021.

- The Institute joined other leading national mental health voices in a **CEO Collaborative Huddle**, **aligning innovation and advocacy efforts across the nation for pandemic-related mental health and substance use issues**.

- The Institute released its first weekly **provider newsletter** to highlight **COVID-related changes and extensions to regulatory and reimbursement rules** – a widely used statewide resource that continued into 2021.

April

- The Institute released the first of a series of **reports analyzing the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Volume 1 focused on the **likelihood of more deaths from suicide and substance overdose**. The report raised early attention to the probability of the pandemic worsening these underlying epidemics, and was **cited widely by news outlets across the country**.

- Okay to Say launched a series of **Facebook Live and Instagram Live events** called **Let's Talk: Coping with COVID-19**. During 2020, Okay to Say hosted 21 conversations with expert guests about **how to stay mentally healthy while supporting others during the pandemic**.

- The Meadows Institute and Caruth Police Institute hosted the **Policing in a Pandemic Virtual Peer Networking Series**, which was composed of six interactive, **virtual events** featuring nationally recognized **peer specialists, health and wellness experts, and first responder wellness providers**.

- The Meadows Institute and The Hackett Center **released Emotionally Managing COVID-19: A Parent and Caregiver's Guide**, providing **strategies and resources to parents and caregivers** to help children and youth **cope with fears and anxieties about the pandemic**.

• The Institute and The Rees-Jones Foundation released the **Dallas County Mental Health Service Delivery Systems Assessment** to help Dallas County's children's mental health systems, **providing dozens of actionable recommendations to improve care access and quality.**

• Citing the Institute's research, former Ohio Governor John Kasich and Meadows Institute Board Member Henry Harbin co-authored an op-ed at CNN.com, "**America's mental health COVID-19 recovery needs to start now,**" which brought attention to the mental health effects of the pandemic.

May

• Texas's new statewide **Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN) was launched**, establishing a network of academic hubs to provide telemedicine-based consultation and help pediatric primary care providers better identify and treat the mental health needs of Texas children and youth.

• Okay to Say and Austin City Limits Radio began a **three-part series on mental health during the pandemic, *Anxiety in the Time of COVID.***

• The Hackett Center provided **1,000 free at-home screenings of the documentary *Angst: Raising Awareness Around Anxiety***, coupled with a **discussion guide for parents**, to families in the Gulf Coast region and Austin area.

• Following the brutal murder of George Floyd, the **Institute convened internal gatherings of staff to reflect on its effects on all of us**, the intersection of racism and our work, and **ways to strengthen our equity work** in light of building national momentum toward anti-racism.

June

• The Institute **created a new Senior Director for Health Equity Strategy position to elevate and broaden health equity** work across its entire project portfolio.

• The Institute **provided the final results of its comprehensive community mental health needs assessment** to the **Nueces County Hospital District Board and County Commissioners Court** and began consulting with local leaders on implementation strategies.

• The Meadows Institute partnered with the Cohen Veterans Network to release **Volume 2 in the white paper series analyzing the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact**, with a specific focus on veterans.

• The Institute kicked off its **2020 El Paso County Behavioral Health System Assessment**, a 10-month effort funded by the Paso del Norte Health Foundation to improve care in the region.

July

• Senators John Cornyn of Texas and Michael Bennet of Colorado invited **Andy Keller to join national experts for a bipartisan telebriefing** for the United States **Senate** on the **mental health impacts of the pandemic.**

• **Midland Independent School District implemented** the first component of a **comprehensive plan** developed by the Institute's Child and Family Policy Team to **improve coordination of mental health services and supports in schools.**

• The **Third Annual Nantucket Children's Mental Health Summit was held virtually** with partner medical schools in Houston, the Texas Gulf Coast region, and Massachusetts, **aiming to find**

ways to strengthen work on the twin challenges of 2020: COVID-driven mental health needs and the intersection of equity and racial justice.

• **Andy Keller was invited to the National Press Club** in Washington, D.C., to **present at the national launch of the REACH public health awareness campaign** by the President's PREVENTS task force for **combatting suicide among veterans** and the broader public.

• **Taylor Counseling Group**, a Texas-based counseling provider, **announced that for every counseling session** its team provided, it would **donate \$1 to the Okay to Say campaign.**

August

• The Institute joined with California's Steinberg Institute to release **Volume 3 of the COVID-19 white paper series**, highlighting actionable **solutions that could annually prevent up to 14,500 deaths from suicide and up to 24,000 overdose deaths nationwide.**

• In the Lubbock region, the Texas Tech Mental Health Initiative announced the **West Texas Mental Health Collaborative**, formed in response to **recommendations from the Institute's 2019 mental health assessment.**

• The **Okay to Say Mental Health Girl Scouts patch program was launched** statewide. More than **4,000 Texas Girl Scouts earned the patch in 2020.**

• Stronger **health equity strategies and action steps** were presented to and **approved by the Executive Committee of the Meadows Institute Board.**

September

• **Julie Kaplow authored an op-ed** in the **Houston Chronicle** that discussed the **mental health impact of Hurricane Laura on people who survived the**

YEAR IN REVIEW

trauma of **Hurricane Harvey**, detailing the signs of trouble parents should look for in their children.

- **B.J. Wagner helped launch a new Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) training program**

to empower law enforcement officers to intervene with evidence-based and effective strategies when colleagues are on the verge of making critical mistakes or engaging in misconduct.

- The **Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center** in Houston, led by Executive Director Julie Kaplow, was **welcomed into The Hackett Center**. The TAG Center raises the standard of care and increases access to best practice care for youth who have experienced trauma and bereavement.

- **Andy Keller joined Dr. Jonathan Sherin**, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, on One Mind's *Brain Waves* program to take a **deeper dive into the mental health impacts of a COVID-driven economic downturn**.

October

- Our **Fifth Annual Engage & Excel went virtual** to bring together hundreds of experts and community leaders from around the state and nation. Participants previewed the 87th Legislative Session with Texas Representatives **Joe Moody** and **Four Price**; learned from national civil rights attorney **Roy L. Austin, Jr.**, about transforming policing through ABLE; **Vic Armstrong** on healing racial trauma; and **Michelle Alletto**, Texas Health and Human Services Commission's chief program and services officer – along with her top deputies, **Sonja Gaines**, **Stephanie Stephens**, and **Mike Maples** – on Texas's mental health response to COVID-19.

- **The Hackett Center anchored the clinical review for *A Trusted***

Space, a docu-training film launched nationally to help school leaders and teachers respond to the grief, trauma, anxiety, and emotional stressors that students and staff faced during the turmoil of 2020.

- The Meadows Board approved a series of initiatives to **enact a focused health equity strategy**, updating our vision and mission statements, adding measurable goals and objectives, and adopting a set of key concepts and definitions to guide our internal and external equity work.

- Former Ohio **Governor John Kasich** and **Andy Keller** teamed up for the **first** of an ongoing **Facebook Live series** of wide-ranging conversations that delve deeply into the **issues affecting mental health and mental health policy** in America today.

November

- The **Institute joined the steering committee** of the **National Response to COVID-19 on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**, a national public-private partnership bringing the best in science, innovation, and communications to bear on the fight against the mental health and addiction impacts of COVID-19.

- **Children's Health**, the Institute's core partner for children's mental health in North Texas, **announced a challenge grant award of \$7.5 million** by the Hamon Charitable Foundation to launch a joint effort with us to meet the growing pediatric mental health crisis by **helping primary care providers across the region detect and treat pediatric mental health needs** earlier and more effectively.

- Former U.S. Representative **Patrick Kennedy** and **John Snook**, executive director of the Treatment Advocacy Center, **praised Dallas's RIGHT Care program** in a national

op-ed that discussed the need to transform responses to mental health emergencies.

December

- A **historic coalition of the nation's top 14 mental health organizations**, including the Meadows Institute, **released *A Unified Vision for Transforming Mental Health & Substance Use Care*** to help the nation's leaders re-envision the country's mental health and substance use care systems post-COVID.

- Through a **generous grant from the Hoblitzelle Foundation**, the Institute **launched a new, state-of-the-art website: mmhpi.org**.

- **Andy Keller provided invited testimony** before the Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, **offering concrete recommendations in response to the worsening mental health impacts of COVID-19**. Most notable of these was the **addition of Collaborative Care** to help the Texas Medicaid program detect and treat mental health needs earlier and more effectively. He also discussed the **need to strengthen mental health care more broadly** to bolster the state's economic health, as a healthy workforce will help rebuild the Texas economy as the pandemic recedes.

Looking ahead to 2021, we will continue to promote sound policy and equitable solutions to transform MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN TEXAS AND THE NATION.

Taking on the EPIDEMIC WITHIN THE PANDEMIC

Like many organizations around the world reacting to the unprecedented uncertainty and growing trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute first prioritized the health and well-being of its staff and contractors. On March 13, the Institute suspended travel and expanded work-from-home capabilities and flexibilities to support staff in their work and their new responsibilities at home, including online schooling and care for vulnerable family members. We also instituted daily briefings by leadership on COVID-related challenges and initiated online group offerings to bolster staff cohesion and mutual support that were fully in place by the end of March and continued into 2021.

Even as we took proactive steps to ensure our safety and continued work, we also turned our attention to the changing and growing needs of the



larger community being adversely affected by COVID-19. One immediate focus was on front-line care providers, including mental health and first responder professionals who not only had to cope with the personal strains of the pandemic but also faced an expanding workload in unusually hazardous conditions. We advocated for personal protective equipment for mental health workers and promoted telehealth options, including audio-only access, to ensure isolated Texans could still access the mental health care and support they needed.

Also in March, the Institute joined a dozen top national mental health organizations in weekly CEO coordination meetings to align national advocacy efforts for pandemic-related mental health and substance use issues, advancing priorities such as adding audio-only care to Medicare and expanding mental health and substance use disorder block grant funding to maximize state-level flexibility in responding to unprecedented challenges and needs.

In response to requests from county officials across Texas, in March we issued policy guidance on the potential release of non-violent offenders from jail as part of the pandemic response. This was shared with the Office of the Governor, which later issued its own guidance consistent with our recommendations.

To house and provide easy access to all the data we were gathering and producing, in March we launched a web page containing links to a range of pandemic-related resources. This included Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance for emergency medical services systems and law enforcement officers, as well as updated information for parents and caregivers from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, along with experts from the Institute and across the nation. That same month, we initiated the first of the 38 Regulatory & Reimbursement Newsletters we issued in 2020. These newsletters kept mental health and addiction service providers apprised of new and ever-changing regulations affecting the delivery of care at the local, state, and federal levels.

Beginning in April, the Institute released the first in a series of white papers examining how the economic impacts

of the pandemic were likely to increase rates of suicide, projecting an additional 300 lives could be lost each year in Texas and more than 4,000 nationwide. This drew wide-ranging attention from lawmakers and the national press, including a CNN.com op-ed by Former Ohio Governor John Kasich and Meadows Institute Board Member Henry Harbin advocating that “America’s mental health COVID-19 recovery needs to start now.”

Beginning in the earliest days of the lockdown, we also worked to bring communities together, even as the pandemic was forcing isolation. In April, Okay to Say launched a live Q&A series on Facebook and Instagram, *Let’s Talk: Coping with COVID-19*, enabling people to connect directly with experts about the mental health issues they and their families were facing. Also in April, we commenced *Policing in a Pandemic*, a virtual peer support series in partnership with the Caruth Police Institute. Law enforcement experts engaged on topics including peer support, stress management, maintaining optimism, and planning for the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to support first responders.

From a policy standpoint, we worked with state and federal policymakers to add a Texas perspective as regulations and relief dollars were contemplated, and partnered with philanthropists, providers, and advocates to ensure Texans received the flexibilities and resources they needed. These efforts helped



shape state and national waivers for telemedicine and telehealth delivery and their renewals into 2021.

Throughout the global pandemic, the Institute leveraged our reputation as a trusted source for data-driven information by reaching beyond Texas to join our national partners in confronting COVID-19's dramatic effects on our economy and daily lives, including its impact on mental health and addiction. We continued issuing white papers detailing the recession's impact on suicide and drug overdose deaths, and highlighted immediately actionable steps to reduce their toll and save tens of thousands of lives. This helped frame a national discussion and kept federal, state, and local policymakers informed.

Entering 2021, the Institute continued our commitment to help lead the national response to these unprecedented challenges with factual and reliable guidance to prevent, detect, and effectively treat our state and nation's growing mental health and addiction epidemics within the broader pandemic.





**The battles that count
aren't the ones for gold
medals. The struggles
within yourself - the
invisible, inevitable battles
inside all of us - THAT'S
WHERE IT'S AT.**

— *Jesse Owens*



Shining a Light THROUGH THE STORM

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe in early 2020, it brought the state, national, and world economies to a halt in an unprecedented fashion. In addition to concerns about getting sick themselves, people across Texas faced the sudden and very real prospect of losing their childcare, their jobs, and their homes.

Public attention necessarily first focused on the infectious disease impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and secondarily on its economic impact. But the intersection between a COVID-induced economic recession and mental health had gone, for the most part, unexplored in those first few weeks.

In April, just a month after the national lockdown was fully in place, the Institute began to chart that territory, releasing the first of what would become a series of white papers projecting how the pandemic would affect “diseases of despair,” such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and the potential tragic outcomes of increased deaths due to suicide and drug overdose.

The numbers were staggering. In Texas alone, our models projected that – absent an increase in preparedness to detect and treat depression and addiction – every five percentage point annual increase in the unemployment rate could each year result in 300 additional lives lost to suicide and 425 to drug overdose. Nationwide, 4,000 more Americans could annually be lost to suicide and 4,800 more to overdose.

The report also projected that rates of depression and addiction, more broadly, would be many times higher than the rates of suicide and overdose.

Indeed, by the end of 2020, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data reported a four-fold increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety, and a doubling in the number of people seriously considering suicide. By year’s end, overdose deaths were up over one-third and suicide rates were increasing to unprecedented levels among people of color and young women.

The Institute’s white paper series – which included state-by-state breakdowns and the projected impact on the veteran population – helped frame the discussion, both in Texas and nationally. The reports were the basis for news stories published in outlets like the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and CNN. The series even merited mention in a newspaper in Chennai, India. Most importantly, the papers compelled people to talk about the mental health impact within the context of an unprecedented global crisis.

With an impending surge in mental health and substance use needs, policymakers and health systems needed to not only prepare, but also find specific ways to mitigate the impact. To provide that, in August, we released a white paper focused on a policy shift that could pay huge dividends by not just preventing an increase but actually reversing the decades-long worsening in rates of death from suicide and overdose. By simply implementing the collaborative care model in primary care practices nationwide and providing universal access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for addiction, thousands of Texans and tens of thousands of Americans could be saved each year.

We carefully projected how broader access to collaborative care – a team-based approach to detect and treat mental health and addiction more effectively in primary care settings – could prevent between 9,000 and 14,500 deaths from suicide each year nationwide, saving between 725 and 1,100 lives in Texas. Further, expanding MAT access to everyone with an opioid use disorder could prevent 24,000 overdose deaths nationwide, including an additional 1,600 people in Texas.

These recommendations were subsequently mirrored in national policy guidance issued by the Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response, convened by Dr. Joshua Gordon, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, and former U.S. Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum. They were also reflected in comprehensive recommendations by both RAND and the Bipartisan Policy Center, as well as *A Unified Vision for Transforming Mental Health & Substance Use Care*, released at year’s end by 14 of the top mental health organizations in the U.S., including the Meadows Institute.

During 2020, our white papers helped lead the policy discussion surrounding the mental health impacts of the pandemic, both in Texas and across the country, and real progress was achieved to improve mental health and substance use disorder care in the state through the reliable, relevant, and important data and guidance we shared.

Strengthening our HEALTH EQUITY STRATEGIES and ACTIONS

Health equity has been a priority for the Meadows Institute since our founding. In multiple areas, recognizing that disproportionate health outcomes and disparate needs for access to – and quality of – care across marginalized communities is essential to health promotion.

In October 2019, the Institute board asked us to develop a formal strategy on health equity, and our work on that was in progress when COVID-19 hit. Even in the pandemic's earliest days, we could clearly see the disproportionate impacts it was having across race and ethnicity.

As our work continued, however, the murder of fellow Texan George Floyd, and the unprecedented response of the nation to his death, heightened the level of attention paid to the long history of racism in America, leading us to step back and ask if we were doing all that we could to combat racial injustice. Amidst national unrest and invigorated calls for justice, we elevated our health equity work and further sharpened our focus. In June, our Board formed a Health Equity Steering Committee chaired by board member Dr. Altha Stewart, a proven champion of equity. She was joined in that effort by our

long-time Senior Fellow for Health Equity, Dr. Quianta Moore, as well as members of our executive team and senior staff.

In July, Institute leadership created a new position, Senior Director of Health Equity Strategy, to lead our efforts on equity, both within our work and across the Institute more broadly. The position was filled by Marcy Melvin, who has been with the Institute since 2018 and who brought to the position a deep understanding of both the causes of inequity and the most effective ways to fight it.

SPOTLIGHT

The qualities that make an outstanding actor – an innate understanding of human nature, empathy, and insight into people's behavior – are many of the same qualities that make an excellent psychiatrist.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, therefore, that before Dr. Altha Stewart pursued psychiatry, acting had been her first love. It was a path she might have pursued more aggressively if her mother hadn't kept her oriented toward medical school.

"I used to kid my mother that, thanks to her, I was probably the only doctor, maybe in the world, who really saw medicine as a back-up plan," Stewart said. Even as she was finishing her pre-med degree, the Tennessee native was also heading across town to another school so she could take acting classes. Eventually, she joined a repertory theater group that performed plays regionally.

Ultimately, though, the lure of medicine proved stronger and, while we can only speculate about what accolades she might have landed in the theater, it's hard to imagine they would be more distinguished than her achievements as a psychiatrist.

In addition to being the first Black person elected as President of the

American Psychiatric Association, she has also run some of the largest public mental health systems in the country, earned the National Alliance on Mental Illness Exemplary Psychiatrist Award in both 2002 and 2020, and was an invited participant at the 1999 White House Conference on Mental Health – and those are only a few of her many other achievements and accolades.

Her expertise at the intersection between mental health and historically marginalized communities is nationally regarded, and she delivered a captivating keynote speech on mental health and juvenile justice at our 2019 Engage & Excel Conference. It wasn't long after that when she was invited to join the Institute's Board of Directors. "I jumped at the chance," Stewart said. "The Meadows Institute



Under Marcy's lead, the Committee devised a new health equity strategic plan centered on a set of clear definitions and key concepts to help ground our efforts, as well as an explicit commitment to combatting racism and promoting equity as an organization

and across our policy and program work. Specific goals and objectives were set to effectively chart our progress. In October, our board unanimously adopted these measures and amended our mission and vision statements to reflect our deepened emphasis on equity.

One critical notion undergirding all of our efforts is the idea of cultural humility, which we define as a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique, whereby individuals learn about each other's cultures and start with an examination of their own beliefs and cultural identities.

We are committed to engaging in hard conversations and to growing and learning together over time.

While we remain sober and concerned, we are also hopeful that we are part of a growing movement across our state and nation to advance anti-racist policies that accelerate efforts to effectively address the health inequities that persist, both within health systems and our society as a whole.

Dr. Altha Stewart

sees challenges as opportunities, and I like those kinds of organizations. If everyone's saying it can't be done, they say, 'Well, have we tried everything?'" From the Institute's perspective, it added one of the nation's foremost leaders in mental health to its Board right before a year of dramatic upheavals and massive change throughout society.

"Dr. Stewart is both a respected leader and a person who inspires trust in both her expertise and her caring," said Andy Keller, Ph.D., President and CEO of the Meadows Institute. "Having her join our Board of Directors was beyond our expectations, and having her leadership and wise counsel as we navigated one of the most challenging years in anyone's memory was not just invaluable, it was a blessing."

And Dr. Stewart is not a person to turn away from challenges. "The pandemic and everything that accompanied it has taken no prisoners," Stewart said. "It is an equal opportunity destroyer of hope, joy, and faith in the future." The need for everyone to recover from the pandemic's impact makes an equitable mental health system even more crucial. "We've got all the ingredients

we need," she said. "If we have the will to try to build trust with communities that don't currently trust the system and to understand that we all have a role to play ... We can move forward in a better way." And she expects the Institute to set a standard as we move toward the future.

"The work that the Meadows Institute has done to craft for itself a framework of equity in the work that it does – and the work that it recommends be done – I think it is raising the bar," she said. "I hope it will be viewed as a national standard." And when it is, it will be thanks to the help of visionary leaders like Dr. Stewart.





“Texans impacted by depression, by anxiety, or by mental health ... because of COVID ARE MAKING OUR ECONOMIC RECOVERY HARDER,” Keller testified.



Legislative INTERIM REPORT

As the Texas Legislature worked throughout the 2020 interim to respond to the pandemic's impact on the lives of Texans and the condition of the state's economy, the Institute consistently provided lawmakers and government officials with the data and guidance they needed.

Culminating the year in December, Meadows Institute President and CEO Andy Keller gave invited testimony before the Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, which met to discuss ways to improve mental health care. Keller discussed how mental health recovery is key to an economic recovery and vice versa. "Texans impacted by depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions that are happening now because of COVID are making our economic recovery harder," Keller testified. "It's a virtuous cycle; the economy helps with our mental health, but the mental health of our workforce also helps with our economy."

More broadly, the Institute worked throughout the year to connect key individuals and organizations with important data on the pandemic and its impact. Beginning in April, we issued a series of white papers projecting how an economic recession can affect rates of suicide, finding that for every five percentage point annual increase in the unemployment rate, an additional 300 lives could be lost each year in Texas and more than 4,000 nationwide. The Institute also connected care providers with timely information on all the changes happening on the local, state, and national levels through the distribution of weekly Regulatory & Reimbursement Newsletters, highlighting modifications and extensions to regulatory and reimbursement rules as

well as providing regulatory guidance and answers to frequently asked questions. From March to December, the Institute published 38 newsletters and continued that practice into the new year.

While the pandemic permeated much of the year's work, our efforts to improve mental health care in Texas were not solely focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. In January, before the pandemic took hold, we published a white paper on suicide rates for law enforcement officers, which included the shocking statistic that, nationwide, more than twice as many officers died from suicide in 2019 than were otherwise killed in the line of duty. The report, in part, inspired Texas Senator Jane Nelson to propose a Texas Law Enforcement Peer Network, which would connect officers with trained peers to discuss issues affecting their mental health and connect them to care. And through it all, the Institute repeatedly emphasized the need for Texas to continue building on the legislature's strong start in improving mental health care it had established over the last several legislative sessions.

Last February, Kyle Mitchell, Vice President of Adult and Veterans Policy, gave invited testimony at the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs and Border Security, addressing their interim charges with a focus on veteran treatments court, veterans' health, and veterans' mental health.

We also continually emphasized the need to continue the state hospital system redesign, a process that took important steps as old buildings were torn down in Austin and San Antonio to make way for new facilities offering state-of-the-art care.

We also dedicated ourselves to the successful launch of the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium (TCMHCC) by supporting the implementation of its key initiatives, including the official launch of the Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), a source pediatricians and primary care providers can consult for assistance in treating their child and adolescent patients with mental health issues. By the end of the year, thousands of Texas providers had registered and hundreds of children were helped.

The TCMHCC also ramped up the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) program in 2020, providing real-time telemedicine and telehealth to support schools' responses to students with urgent psychiatric needs. By year's end, over one million Texas students had access to the program.

The Institute also began laying the groundwork for the 87th Legislature in 2021, identifying areas of need, with a primary focus on the mental health impacts of the pandemic. And, for needs beyond COVID-19, we will continue to provide the Texas Legislature, its professional staff, and our agency partners with data, advice, and guidance to help ensure Texas builds on past successes and continues moving forward as a national leader in mental health care.

Freeing Texans and Americans from DEPRESSION and SUICIDE

Even before the pandemic, America was experiencing an epidemic of deaths from suicide and overdose. Depression is a major driver of both, and, by the end of 2020, depressive symptoms had increased fourfold and the number of people seriously considering suicide had doubled.

That's why, in 2020, we doubled down on our commitment to a simple, yet radical goal: to end untreated depression and give many of the 1.5 million Texans suffering from this disease a better life.

Ending depression is an ambitious undertaking, comparable to efforts to eliminate other diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, and we are hopeful that we can make similar progress against depression. To accomplish this, we are working on multiple fronts on the local, regional, and national levels, aligning policy and programs in innovative ways, and partnering with like-minded organizations to address the crisis and implement solutions on a national scale.

The Cloudbreak Initiative



In 2018, the Institute, in partnership with the Center for Depression Research and Clinical Care at UT Southwestern, began work on what is now known as The Cloudbreak Initiative, a visionary effort to drive primary care-based clinical solutions for depression across leading health systems.

Initially focused on North Texas, the initiative involves translating cutting-edge clinical research and current evidence-based practices within health systems to detect and treat depression sooner and more effectively. We also partnered with

major employer healthcare groups in the region to adopt best practices in health care purchasing for depression treatment for employees and their dependents.

In 2020, The Meadows Foundation added an important component to this work by creating incentive grants to help North Texas health systems:

- Ramp up universal screening for depression,
- Implement measurement-based care (MBC) to track treatment progress routinely over time and adjust as needed (aligned with their approach for hypertension, diabetes, and other diseases), and
- Re-engineer workflows and billing systems to take advantage of new payment codes for primary care-based depression treatment (collaborative care).

By year's end, the first health system grant was awarded to Dallas Methodist Health System, and 2021 promises to be a year of accelerated change through Lyda Hill Philanthropies' Lone Star Prize grant.

EMPOWER

In 2020, we engaged in a new collaboration with Harvard Medical School's Department of Global Health and Social Medicine's EMPOWER program to broaden our community engagement strategies. EMPOWER is an initiative which seeks to build the world's capacity to prevent and care for mental health problems across the life course. The effort builds on two decades of

research demonstrating that community members can be trained to deliver brief psychological treatments for depression, reaching across race, ethnicity, poverty, and other barriers to people who would otherwise experience limited access to needed care. Through EMPOWER, beginning in 2021, we will recruit, train, and deploy community health workers in partnership with health systems throughout North Texas.

The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use



The Meadows Institute helped found The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use in 2019 to promote best practices in the delivery and administration of health care and health care insurance programs. In 2020, Institute President and CEO Andy Keller traveled to Washington, D.C., and delivered a keynote address outlining The Path Forward's



comprehensive, transformative plan for mental health equity to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing Best Practices Working Group. The group, which included some of the largest employers in the United States, heard about the importance of reforming American health systems to help them achieve the promise of mental health parity.

Accreditation Standards to Include Measurement-Based Care

Measurement-based care (MBC) is the use of repeated, validated measures to track symptoms and outcomes in mental health and substance use disorders treatment. Like tracking changes in blood sugar for diabetes or cholesterol levels for heart disease, MBC ensures each patient is receiving individualized treatment for disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Through The Path Forward in 2020, the Institute helped the Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC) integrate MBC into health system accreditation standards, hoping to spark wider adoption of the practice across the country. In July, URAC announced a new designation for MBC to improve outcomes for patients with mental health or substance use disorder diagnoses.

We will continue to work with partners in Texas and across the country toward the goal of detecting and treating every case of depression.





Joining NATIONAL and INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Already well-established as a reliable source for data and insight into the world of mental health policy in Texas, the Institute has steadily increased its profile across the nation and the globe, fostering strategic partnerships with prestigious national and international groups and leaders to effect systemic change in mental health care.

Our most impactful effort was the release of a series of white papers projecting how an economic recession resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic could affect rates of suicide, including a state-by-state analysis. The findings helped frame a national dialogue on the subject and were covered extensively by media outlets in Texas and across the country, including the *Dallas Morning News*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN.com.

Within the first month of the pandemic, the Meadows Institute joined a historic coalition of 14 of the nation's top mental health organizations – the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, The Kennedy Forum, the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Mental Health America, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Association for Behavioral Healthcare, the National Council for

Mental Wellbeing, One Mind, Peg's Foundation, the Steinberg Institute, the Treatment Advocacy Center, and Well Being Trust – to align our responses to COVID-19 and re-envision our country's mental health care system. By year's end, we released a Unified Vision for transforming mental health and substance use care that is featured on our website and was covered by national media.

In April, the Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19 was launched under the leadership of public sector chair, Dr. Joshua Gordon, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, and private sector chair, former U.S. Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum. In the fall, the Institute was asked to join the National Response's Steering Committee, which comprises public and private sector leaders with expertise in science, innovation, and leadership to offer comprehensive, sustainable solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on mental health and well-being. The National Response's six priority areas are directed toward stakeholders who can inspire public engagement, create change, and implement lasting solutions,

including federal and state policymakers, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, employers, health care accreditation organizations, professional associations, health care providers, and public and private payers.

In October, Andy Keller and former Ohio Governor John Kasich launched an ongoing series of Facebook Live conversations. These events feature wide-ranging discussions between the two about the emotional impact of COVID-19 and the larger issues surrounding mental health across the country. The Institute is also harnessing momentum internationally through its collaboration with Harvard Medical School's Department of Global Health and Social Medicine and linkages through this collaboration to demonstrations and partners in India. In addition, the Lancet Commission on Depression has recommended a society-wide, stepped-care response to depression, aligned with The Cloudbreak Initiative, intended for implementation across the globe, that holds promise for efforts in 2021.

Across many fronts, the Institute is looking to make Texas a mental health leader on a national and international scale.



**“You cannot swim
for new horizons
until you have courage to
LOSE SIGHT OF THE SHORE.”**

— *William Faulkner*

SPOTLIGHT

The first time Mike Thompson learned about the [intersection between mental illness and incarceration](#), he was working for the U.S. Courts in Puerto Rico, his first job out of college.



A Spanish major, his duties included working with people running the local prisons and submitting reports to the court about their conditions and situations. “I was just shocked by the extent to which we were hearing family members tell us that loved ones had more access to mental health services while incarcerated than they did while in the community,” the New Jersey native said. “It was good to hear people were getting care, but why did it have to wait until they got to jail?”

It was a lesson he carried with him to his next job, leading The Council of State Governments Justice Center, an association serving governors, judges, and state legislators and advancing cutting-edge policy at the state and local levels. “I felt this was a growing problem that was not getting the attention from local and state officials that it needed,” Thompson said. “So, I started bringing them together so they

could hear more from people working on the front lines of the system, and that resulted in 20 years’ worth of work.”

It was still on his mind when he joined The Pew Charitable Trusts in 2017, but he figured his attention would be spread thin on a wider range of issues, such as post-secondary education, tax policy, and other health issues. The next year, however, the Pew Board of Directors hosted Judge Steven Leifman, a powerful advocate for system reform who described his experiences seeing person after person with mental illness appear in his courtroom – sometimes multiple times – and that really caught the Board’s attention. Suddenly, Thompson’s signature issue was back on his front burner. “Maybe it was destiny,” he said. Collectively, Pew started looking at programs around the country they could support. However, at best, what they found didn’t seem scalable. At worst, what they found didn’t seem practical.

Transforming Policing by ADDRESSING TRAUMA AND HEALTH

Even before the upheaval that engulfed our nation after the murder of George Floyd, the Institute was working intensively to identify and implement ways to improve police response to mental health-related emergencies, law enforcement wellness, and approaches to de-escalate dangerous situations. This work centered on our multi-year partnership with the Caruth Police Institute at the University of North Texas-Dallas (CPI). A trauma-informed lens posits that toxic stress is a common pathway for both over-use of force and mental health outcomes, as police officers are more at risk of dying from suicide than being otherwise killed in the line of duty, and their risk is significantly higher

than the general population’s.

The steady strain of highly stressful working conditions puts officers at a higher risk of neuro-behavioral conditions and can affect their attentional and cognitive control, putting them also at higher risk of harm to self and others. Studies have shown that the cumulative effects of stress results in officers who draw more resident complaints, are more likely to be injured in an accident, and are also more likely to be involved in incidents of a range of problematic conduct, including unnecessary use of force.

Programs like the Texas First Responder Peer Network, initiated by CPI, will

establish a network across the state that connects officers struggling with mental, emotional, or physical health with a supportive peer who provides guidance and advice. This work to improve officer health and wellness was recognized by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which invited the Meadows Institute to present at the Association’s 2021 International Wellness Symposium.

Broader efforts to change police department culture have been demonstrated by the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) program. Based at Georgetown Law’s Innovative Policing Program in Washington, D.C., ABLE aims

Mike Thompson

“What’s out there is often very piecemeal,” Thompson said. “It’s a pilot project serving 30 people, or it’s only focused on what happens once someone appears in court, with insufficient attention given to the role of police.” For an organization like Pew, piecemeal was not what it had in mind.

“One of the things that’s unusual about Pew is it spends a lot of time trying to figure out precisely what it can accomplish within a very specific amount of time and money,” Thompson said. “It wants to be very careful about getting engaged in some sort of open-ended endeavor.” That’s what drew Pew to the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, which was in the midst of the Dallas County Smart Justice program funded by the W. W. Caruth, Jr. Foundation. That project included the Rapid Integrated Group Healthcare Team (RIGHT) Care program being piloted in South Dallas, which dispatches a

community paramedic, a licensed social worker, and a specially trained police officer to the scenes of mental health emergencies. Pew was impressed and started talking with the Institute about where these sorts of programs could go. “We said, if we partner with Meadows, we think we could help them expand upon what they’re doing,” Thompson said. “It’s a really proven approach that we think has implications for other states across the country.” In addition, the opportunity to align Pew investments with investments by leading Texas philanthropists, including the Meadows Foundation and Lyda Hill Philanthropies, also held promise.

Throughout 2020, Pew and the Institute explored ways to scale RIGHT Care – and the model programs it’s based on, which is known as a multi-disciplinary response team (MDRT) – to other communities across Texas and potentially the country. As Thompson sees it, MDRT is not just a

strong idea that can improve emergency response, it’s also a timely idea as policymakers and the public better understand the importance of providing better responses for people with mental illnesses who too often end up in jails or emergency departments for care. Transforming the way we approach and resolve mental health emergencies with a systemic approach is a crucial first step in breaking that cycle.

“It’s rising to a whole other level,” Thompson said. “It’s a huge moment to see how we will make the most of the opportunity right now in front of us, at this level of interest.”

Establishing partnerships such as the one with Pew is key to making best practices more available and, one day, making them the expectation for every American facing a mental health emergency.

to empower officers, regardless of experience or rank, to speak up or intervene when they see a partner or other colleague crossing the line into unacceptable behavior.

Programs like ABLE that support bystanders and empower them to help prevent dangerous incidents have been proven for years in the field. In 2020, CPI was approved to become the only approved ABLE training administrator in Texas, amplifying its role in advancing these efforts across the state. Additionally, in the wake of last year’s policing protests, more attention focused on programs such as RIGHT Care, a South Dallas program the Meadows Institute helped design through a grant from the W.W. Caruth,

Jr. Foundation and that we are expanding in partnership with The Pew Charitable Trusts. RIGHT Care proved very effective, both in achieving better outcomes for people experiencing mental health emergencies and in reducing unnecessary officer involvement in health situations. Dallas city leaders have announced plans to expand it citywide next year.

RIGHT Care also drew attention nationally. Media outlets from Spectrum News to the *Dallas Morning News* to *Fast Company* magazine produced features on RIGHT Care, with the stories leading to inquiries from congressional leaders wanting to learn more. In November, former U.S. Representative Patrick Kennedy and John Snook, executive

director of the Treatment Advocacy Center, published an op-ed at TheHill.com that featured RIGHT Care prominently, lauding it and other programs that seek to decriminalize mental illness and minimize the use of law enforcement to provide mental health care in a crisis.

Texas programs like the First Responder Peer Network, ABLE, and RIGHT Care are emerging as positive, transformative, and readily implementable options in the crucial, and ongoing, national discussion about how we improve law enforcement in America.

SPOTLIGHT Robert Mong

Decades of service as editor and managing editor of the *Dallas Morning News* earned Robert Mong an understanding of his community that few others can claim, and he brought all of those insights to the University of North Texas at Dallas (UNT-D) when he was named its president in 2015.

From the moment he set foot on campus, he knew the challenges and problems he wanted to address, for students at the university, as well as the community as a whole. “Our vision is to create a pathway to social and economic mobility for our students,” Mong said. “So many of them have been stuck in cycles of intergenerational poverty, coming from modest household circumstances. The goal is to get them into the middle class ... and beyond.”

As Mong describes it, UNT-D is focused on producing graduates who not only land quality jobs, but also fill the kinds of quality jobs that are most needed in North Texas, such as police officers and

teachers. Or, as Mong puts it, “local students with local careers in high-need local jobs.” In 2019, when Mong learned the Caruth Police Institute (CPI) at UNT-D had a chance to recruit a new executive director, he recognized an opportunity to do more than fill local needs. After a call with a colleague at the Meadows Institute, his vision for CPI began to exceed North Texas. “Before our partnership with Meadows, CPI was pretty much a police training organization that promoted best practices, mostly for the Dallas Police Department,” Mong said. “We wanted to serve officers even better and think bigger.”

The initial call to Meadows grew into a burgeoning partnership, and by the end of 2019, UNT-D and the Institute had extensively redesigned CPI into a premier center for police training, policy analysis, technical assistance, and research for the region, the state, and, increasingly, the nation.

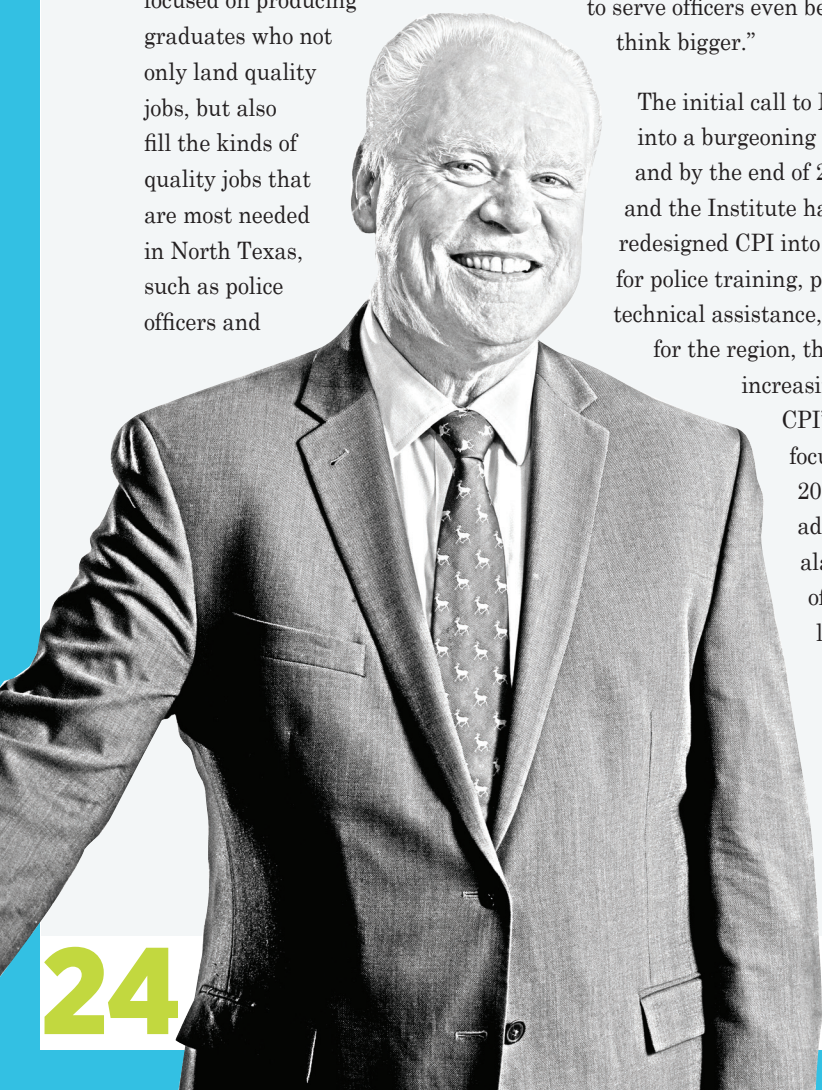
CPI’s primary focus in early 2020 centered on addressing the alarming levels of suicide among law enforcement officers. But, even before George Floyd’s death in May, CPI was already exploring

broader policing reforms, such as the Active Bystandership in Law Enforcement (ABLE) program.

Connected to the Georgetown Law’s Innovative Policing Program by new Executive Director (and Meadows Institute Senior Fellow of Justice System Policy) B.J. Wagner, CPI worked toward becoming a partner in ABLE training – just one of countless partnerships that Mong has facilitated across the university in a variety of disciplines. “You have to have a shared goal and a sense of urgency,” Mong said. “This kind of collective action, it leads to change.”

“It’s the ability to bring organizations together to facilitate that kind of collaborative effort and shared vision that makes Mong special,” says John Petrila, Meadows Institute Senior Executive Vice President of Policy. “It works because of President Mong’s dedication,” Petrila said. “These kinds of partnerships are in his DNA, and he’s infused that into the DNA of the university.”

As Mong sees it, the Institute was the perfect partner for his vision to elevate CPI. “I felt a lot of confidence that I couldn’t go wrong partnering with the Meadows Institute,” Mong said. “If we carried our part of it, I knew they would carry their part, and that’s turned out to be true.” While UNT-D may indeed still have its focus on the Dallas area, through efforts like CPI and others, the university is making a significant impact far beyond North Texas.





THE HACKETT CENTER

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Hackett Center: TAKING ON A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

Entering its third year of operations, [The Hackett Center for Mental Health](#) has established a strong reputation for credible and trusted work with a mission of “Putting Policy into Practice[®]” throughout the region, state, and nation. In the face of the unprecedented challenges of 2020, The Hackett Center took a leading role in a response to both racial justice and the broader hardships and losses of COVID-19.

The Hackett Center’s core work included support of the City of Houston/ Baylor College of Medicine’s System of Care grant, which began treating clients in 2020. This initiative provides community education about mental health and the mental health impacts of COVID-19 and natural disasters. Through the year, The Hackett Center shared its expertise through media interviews and television appearances, blog posts and op-eds, webinars, and through its new social media channels and webpage.

The Hackett Center also added critical capacity for responding to the impacts

of COVID-19 on children, youth, and families through its new Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center. Led by Dr. Julie Kaplow, the TAG Center aims to raise the standard of care and increase access to best practice care among traumatized and bereaved children, adolescents, and their families. The TAG Center’s experience working with youth exposed to trauma and loss, includes those who have faced Hurricane Harvey, the Santa Fe High School shooting, Hurricane Maria’s impact on Puerto Rico, racial trauma, community violence, and most recently, deaths due to COVID-19.

The Hackett Center also took the lead

in helping the Institute sharpen its health equity focus, with long-time Hackett Center senior leader Marcy Melvin taking on the role of Senior Director for Health Equity Strategy, and Senior Fellow Dr. Quanta Moore and Executive Director Dr. Gary Blau serving as key advisors. Through their work, The Hackett Center catalyzed the development and spearheaded the implementation of resource materials approved by the Institute’s Board to guide its equity work, establishing The Hackett Center as a growing authority in this area. Just like the people of the Gulf Coast Region, The Hackett Center rose to the challenges of 2020.

The Hackett Center: HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR ONGOING WORK

In response to the many new challenges in 2020, as well as the smaller individual and family tragedies experienced every year in a region that is home to over one quarter of our state, The Hackett Center for Mental Health continued to lead by “Putting Policy into Practice®” in innovative ways. In addition to steering the Institute’s health equity work and becoming the new home for the Trauma and Grief Center, The Hackett Center continued to build relationships and implement programs to improve mental wellness in the Greater Houston and Gulf Coast region, across Texas, and throughout the nation.

Surveying Philanthropic Priorities for Children

The Philanthropy Roundtable called on The Hackett Center to survey over 80 of the nation’s top philanthropists and foundations focusing on children’s mental health. These funders were asked how they had been affected by the pandemic, if their plans for giving had changed, and if they needed additional technical assistance for themselves and their grantees. Results were presented at a Roundtable webinar featuring Dr. Gary Blau and The Hackett Center founding donor Maureen Hackett.

Respondents identified a number of priorities, including implementation of evidence-based practices in schools, mental illness prevention and treatment interventions, best practices in communities, and implementation of integrated care. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported they were concerned about increased stress on families resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from parental unemployment and disruptions to family and child routines, including loss of childcare and the need to attend school

virtually. The survey also found that philanthropic organizations across all levels planned to either maintain current levels (62%) or increase (32%) funding in the wake of the pandemic.

The survey provided a much-needed look at the thinking of funders who are, collectively, a critical component of efforts to address and mitigate the negative impacts of this pandemic.

A Trusted Space

In the summer, The Hackett Center served as the clinical review team for the docu-film, *A Trusted Space: Redirecting Grief to Growth*, a collaboration between the nonprofit organization All It Takes and the creators of the documentary *Angst*. *A Trusted Space* addresses the grief, trauma, anxiety, and other emotional stressors resulting from the complex issues and feelings many students and teachers faced in response to the



COVID-19 pandemic and the year’s other social upheavals. The Hackett Center also helped create an accompanying curriculum for educators, outlining ways to address the emotional issues many students and teachers have faced in the virtual classroom setting.

The film, which had its national launch on PBS Learning Media in the fall of 2020, also featured The Hackett Center’s Marcy Melvin. In addition to promoting the film in Houston, The Hackett Center also hosted virtual screenings and panel discussions across Texas, reaching thousands of people.

Helping Region 4 Education Service Center Address Growing Mental Health Needs

With support from The Powell Foundation, The Hackett Center constructed a dashboard to help the Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC) prioritize needs for support across its 1.2 million students, featuring an interactive map that geographically represents mental health supports available to the region’s 48 public school districts and 40 charter schools. The dashboard provides a broad array of information – including maps, figures, and tables – to help ESC 4 and district leaders respond to the mental health gaps, needs, and opportunities within the region.

Users can easily identify the school districts and charter schools outlined on the Region 4 map. With a simple click on a specific district or school, users can view information, including contextual data about the county in which that district or school is located and information from each local education agency’s (LEA) response to a survey conducted by The Hackett Center during fall 2019.

Each district and school also received a total “support” score, reflected in a color code, allowing users to quickly and easily compare LEAs. As Region 4 Deputy Director Kelly Ingram, Ed.D., stated, “This excellent tool provides the



“This provides the foundation for our mental wellness work and gives us an incredible opportunity to engage in initial resource mapping that ESTABLISHES A BASELINE OF DISTRICT SERVICES IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS.”

- Kelly Ingram, Ed.D., Deputy Executive Director, Division of Instructional Services, Region 4 Education Service Center

foundation for our mental wellness work. It represents a needs assessment for our entire region and gives us an incredible opportunity to engage in initial resource mapping to establish a baseline of district services. This data is essential as we apply a research-based framework model to expand and enhance our

supports. It also enables us to make deep connections and establish collaborative partnerships that will benefit the over 1.2 million students we serve.”

Based on this work, ESC Region 18, which covers over 37,000 square miles and includes Midland, requested the

development of a similar dashboard for its use, expanding the impact of the original dashboard. As students return to in-person school, this information will be crucial for districts in both Regions 4 and 18 to identify and support schools with the greatest needs.

The Hackett Center: NANTUCKET CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the Third Annual Nantucket Children’s Mental Health Summit to go virtual, and the pandemic was the central topic of this year’s work. Two dozen children’s mental health leaders from across the Texas Gulf Coast and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts focused on both the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and how the pandemic heightened attention on racial injustice and health disparities across the nation.

This annual gathering is sponsored by The Hackett Center for Mental Health and co-hosted with the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health. It brings together prominent children’s mental health experts from the two states to push the boundaries on ways to improve access to care and better align mental health professionals to help children and families, as well as

the schools and primary care providers that support them.

Previous summits have led to significant changes to mental health policy in Texas. For example, the Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), now in place statewide, was a major focus of the first summit in 2018, and in 2019 the group focused on implementation of urgent responses, including the school-based infrastructure of the Texas Child Health Access Through Telehealth (TCHATT) program that reached over 1 million Texas students by the end of 2020.

Conversations at the 2020 summit included how COVID-19 has reshaped the delivery of mental health services, including the use of telehealth, as well as how the increased public awareness of racism and racist policy has generated

anxiety and depression, along with increased opportunities for change.

Through a virtual format, participants engaged in lively and meaningful conversations, and the group committed to join an “Interim Virtual Summit” in early 2021 to maintain momentum and collaboration on meaningful policy and practice change in both states.



The Hackett Center Welcomes the TRAUMA & GRIEF CENTER

The Hackett family established The Hackett Center for Mental Health in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey with an initial focus on addressing the storm's traumatic impact on children and families in the Greater Houston and Gulf Coast Region. The 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School further underscored the need to address trauma and grief, and trauma response has continued to be a central component of The Hackett Center's work. The deep need in the region for more trauma and grief resources made The Hackett Center a natural home for the Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center.

An innovative and highly respected leader nationally, Executive Director Julie Kaplow, Ph.D., A.B.P.P., launched her first TAG Center in 2012. The center's focus is to develop, evaluate, and disseminate evidence-based practices to address trauma and loss. The TAG Center at The Hackett Center provides a range of supports for clinicians caring for children, youth, and families with such experiences. Although the TAG Center is not a direct service provider, it is affiliated with a group practice, also led by Dr. Kaplow, called the Lucine Center. With support from the New York Life (NYL) Foundation, the TAG

The TAG Center has four primary aims:

1. Develop and disseminate evidence-based assessment and interventions for children and youth who have experienced trauma or loss.
2. Conduct research on adaptive and maladaptive responses to childhood trauma and loss, as well as on the effectiveness of treatments.
3. Provide training, professional education, and program consultation on trauma- and bereavement-related topics and interventions.
4. Translate trauma- and bereavement-informed best practices into policy.

SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Julie Kaplow wasn't too far removed from childhood herself the first time she discovered childhood **trauma and grief**.

A freshman at the University of Michigan, she had the chance to be part of the research team of field pioneer Albert Cain, and that work included direct conversations with children who had experienced the death of a parent. "It really opened my eyes, because it's every child's worst nightmare to lose a parent," she said. "To see how resilient they were, it started to get my wheels turning... What is it that is helping these kids to be okay?"

The experiences of these children thereby launched her life's work. In 2012, she created her first Trauma and Grief (TAG) Center at the University

of Michigan Medical School. Two years later, at a colleague's suggestion, she explored the possibility of relocating to Texas. While she hadn't been looking to move, she was drawn to the Gulf Coast Region's deep needs. "There was such a gaping need in Texas, particularly in Houston, around trauma and grief for children," she said. "I felt like there was more I could do in Texas than I could do in Michigan."

Since arriving in Texas, her work has steadily expanded. What started out primarily as a service-oriented center, aiming to help children and youth directly, evolved to include a significant research component. "I realized very quickly we needed to be doing, in parallel, research on this population, because the field was relatively stagnant,





Center spent the last quarter of 2020 preparing to launch a Virtual Learning Library on bereavement and grief in 2021, with free webinars and resources for clinicians, educators, pediatricians, law enforcement, youth and families, and policymakers. The NYL grant also provides support to develop a national “TAG Coalition,” composed of school- and community-based clinicians across the United States trained in the TAG Center’s evidence-based interventions, allowing for greater access to best practice trauma- and grief-informed care.

In late 2020, the TAG Center was the

recipient of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant, *Developing Evidence-Based Trauma- and Bereavement-Informed Care for Puerto Rican Children and Families Impacted by Hurricane Maria*. In collaboration with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico, this grant focuses on effective methods to deliver evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and community-centered trauma- and bereavement-informed care to children and youth affected by Hurricane Maria, compounded by a recent earthquake, ongoing community violence, and pandemic-related losses. The TAG Center will train local clinicians to provide Trauma and Grief

Component Therapy and will adapt this treatment for the population. This grant will also allow the TAG Center to design a “blueprint” for how to respond to future disasters in underserved communities where ongoing trauma and loss is extensive and widespread.

The addition of the TAG Center is helping further realize the Hackett family’s vision for The Hackett Center for Mental Health to take the lead in addressing trauma and bereavement in the Gulf Coast Region and beyond.

Dr. Julie Kaplow

especially in terms of grief,” she said. “We built that into the treatment piece, allowing our clinical work and research to inform each other.”

Following that came the need to address another critical gap: training. “We recognized that most community-based and school-based clinicians had really never had training surrounding grief, nor how to recognize or treat trauma,” she said. Therefore, the Center added this third component. And it was yet another component that, in 2020, led Dr. Kaplow to establish her new TAG Center within The Hackett Center for Mental Health.

“The new mission was policy and its bi-directional connections to effective practice,” Dr. Kaplow said. “Now we

know what treatments work for which children. We know what schools need to be doing to better to address trauma and grief. So, how do we help every child and family across Texas gain access to these supports when and where they need them?” The Hackett Center’s mission of “Putting Policy into Practice®” was a perfect fit, and Dr. Kaplow and the TAG Center launched their new work here in September. “What I’m most excited about now is being able to take that next step and start to implement more policies that can have a larger impact,” she said.

The other core missions remain central. “Grief is on the tip of everyone’s tongue now,” Dr. Kaplow said. “Particularly because of COVID-19 and the fact that we’ve lost so many people, and more and

more grieving children are going to be going back to school in the fall. I think what makes the TAG Center unique is that – while there are lots of trauma specialty centers across the United States – there are almost none that focus on the important interplay between trauma and grief. “What we’ve often found is that children and youth are not able to grieve until they process the traumatic aspects of what they experienced. What tends to be most effective is addressing the trauma first, and then the grieving process naturally evolves after that.”

The Hackett Center is proud to have the TAG Center on board helping advance its mission of improving the lives of children in the Gulf Coast Region and beyond.

Helping Texas Lead the Nation in CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental illnesses are primarily pediatric illnesses, as half of all mental illnesses emerge by age 14 and three-quarters by our mid-20s, the time the brain is fully developed. While the Institute has always prioritized the mental health needs of children and youth, in 2020, that work moved to an entirely new level as we helped Texas medical schools and health systems launch nationally leading supports through family doctors, schools, and the broader community.

Among the year's top projects:

The centerpiece of these efforts was the launch of the **Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium**. Created in 2019 by the 86th Legislature, the Consortium was finalizing its plans and ramping up just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Despite the challenges in May 2020, the Consortium launched on schedule and by the year's end had brought enhanced supports to thousands of primary care practices and dozens of school districts serving over 1 million students.

The Consortium's **Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN)** connects pediatric primary care providers with expert treatment guidance from mental health consultation hubs located at Texas medical schools. Additionally, the **Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT)** program provides schools with support by assessing the urgent psychiatric needs of students and providing them with a limited number of mental health visits at no cost. The Institute serves on the Executive Committee of the Consortium, and our implementation team provided direct support to two-thirds of the participating medical schools.

Dallas County Children's Mental Health Services Report: In the spring, the Institute released an assessment of Dallas County's children's mental health service delivery systems. The report, funded by The Rees-Jones Foundation, provided recommendations to integrate measurement-based screening and assessment supports into primary care. Recommendations also focused on telehealth, telemedicine, and the need to expand evidence-based strategies. We continue to work with The Rees-Jones Foundation and community-based providers to further support the work providers do throughout the Dallas community and build capacity for evidence-based services.

Virtual Training in Southeast Texas: Working with Mental Health America of Southeast Texas, we developed three virtual training webinars for school practitioners, clinicians, and school staff. "Social Emotional Learning," "Trauma-Informed Care: Pre/Post COVID-19," and "Self-Care" served to help educators better identify and support students with mental health concerns.



HALF
OF ALL
Mental Health
Conditions
MANIFEST BY
AGE 14
AND **75%**
DO BY THE TIME
THEY REACH
AGE 24



Promoting Emotional Wellness in TEXAS SCHOOLS

COVID-19 starkly reminded us of the critical role schools play in the social and emotional development of children, in particular support for students who are dealing with anxiety, stress, and other mental health concerns.

To that end, in April, pediatric and school mental health experts from across the Institute and The Hackett Center helped the Gulf Coast's Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC) develop an Emotional Wellness Strategic Implementation Framework.

Tailored to existing resources available in Region 4 ESC, the framework incorporates a structure of Multi-Tiered Services and Supports (MTSS) to provide the region's districts and schools clear direction on effectively addressing the mental health needs of the 1.2 million students they serve. Simply put, the MTSS structure addresses student needs on three levels:

- Tier 1, or universal supports, promotes the general emotional health of all students and enables early identification of needs requiring support.
- Tier 2 services are directed toward students experiencing mild to moderate behavioral health needs, with a focus on skill building – such as anger management or social skills – to increase

emotional wellness and improve academic outcomes.

- Tier 3 interventions and supports are designed for a small portion of students with highly complex needs. These services are holistic, empirically proven, and tailored to the needs of the individual student.

The framework is designed to encourage partnerships and community collaboration, providing stakeholders in the region with information on service funding options and sustainability, mental health prevalence data to help anticipate potential needs, additional data collection and analysis options for monitoring outcomes, and resources on evidence-based interventions and programs.

This initiative has placed Region 4 ESC in a better position to use its resources to help districts and schools ensure access to mental health services and supports as effectively as possible. Further, it holds the potential of helping other ESC regions across Texas better support the mental health needs of students, teachers, and staff in schools they represent.



FOSTER CARE REFORM in North Texas

For years, the Institute has been helping communities across the state prepare for the implementation of Community-Based Care (CBC), a set of much-needed reforms within the state's foster care system that put more emphasis on placing children and youth within their home communities, keeping sibling groups together, and improving placement stability. CBC is rolling out across the state, region by region over a multi-year period, with each roll out

requiring years of careful planning to achieve the desired outcomes.

In 2020, the Institute's work in this area focused on 12 counties in North Texas that comprise the Department of Family and Protective Services' (DFPS) Region 3, including Dallas, Denton, and Collin counties. To help them prepare for the transition from state-run foster care to the community-driven CBC model, we first conducted an environmental assessment,

collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to establish a baseline understanding of the region's capacity to serve children and youth in foster care.

This type of environmental assessment provides communities with critical information and ideas to plan for and establish a regional foster care program that meets the diverse needs of the children, youth, and families within each region, with emphasis on establishing

West Texas: Creating SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS for PERMIAN BASIN SCHOOLS

In 2020, the Institute launched a major school mental health project in the Midland area. The result of an impressive collaborative effort centered on a shared commitment to improving student well-being and success.

Stakeholders in Midland, spearheaded by the Abell-Hanger Foundation and its Executive Director Mark Palmer, recognized the extent of the need for improvement in their community, and knew the only way to develop effective, long-term solutions was for Midland leaders to come together and make it happen. As a result, Abell-Hanger joined with philanthropic partners the Scharbauer Foundation, the King Foundation, the Yarborough Foundation, the Henry Foundation, and Chevron to collaborate with the Institute to develop and implement meaningful and sustainable school mental health programming.

Bolstered by strong community support, we teamed with the Midland Independent School District (MISD) and the Region 18 Educational Service Center (ESC) to help its schools effectively identify

and respond to student mental health needs. Through a multi-phase project with MISD, the Institute is collecting and analyzing school data, developing a professional development action plan, and providing ongoing technical assistance through training and coaching to support implementation of the MISD action plan. This will help students connect with timely mental health resources and enable the district to meet recent school mental health legislative requirements.

To support the long-term growth and sustainability of MISD mental health programming, the Institute's project team established three aligned efforts to support program development and implementation: one with district leadership, one that included mental health experts from local schools, and a third that utilized community partners. We continued to have a significant role in this work into 2021, and the project will unfold across multiple years.

For the Region 18 ESC project, our team worked to develop a mental health strategic framework to guide the implementation of mental health

activities supported by the ESC. Using this framework, Region 18 ESC can help local districts and schools better understand student mental health needs and ensure better access to appropriate mental health services and supports.

This is a massive undertaking: Region 18 ESC serves 88,000 students across a large geographic footprint, 26,000 of whom attend MISD schools. By training school staff to better identify and respond to emerging and more significant student mental health concerns, and by working with local mental health care providers to help address these needs, these projects are designed to improve student well-being and bolster academic outcomes.

The community is determined to do better for the region's students and, because of their commitment, teachers and staff will be in a far better position to respond to student mental health needs exacerbated by the pandemic – needs that will take months or even years to fully emerge.

and strengthening partnerships with community-based organizations in a position to help.

The North Texas environmental assessment report outlined findings and recommendations on numerous topics, including regional foster care trends, child welfare system capacity, the local courts, mental health providers, and education systems. It also featured information collected from a series of focus groups with foster families and with

youth who spent time in foster care.

This project turned out to be extremely timely. Toward the end of 2020, the DFPS announced that all remaining counties in DFPS Region 3 would be the next in the state to implement CBC. This made readiness efforts in the region even more critically important and meant the report could be used immediately to help the community take actionable steps to prepare for CBC implementation.

We are proud to be playing a crucial role in ensuring that preparation and implementation of CBC goes as smoothly as possible in North Texas and elsewhere, resulting in better outcomes for children and youth who need foster care – and their families – during what is often one of the most trying times of their lives.

Partnering to IMPROVE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE in Nueces County

The Institute spent most of 2020 working with community members in Nueces County on a comprehensive behavioral health community needs assessment. The goal was to inform the county's efforts to improve behavioral health services for its residents.

The assessment covered multiple issues, with a focus on hospital and emergency services, inpatient bed capacity, expansion of integrated care for children and youth, and diversion from the criminal justice system.

Building on nearly 200 stakeholder interviews and a comprehensive analysis of data on prevalence and service availability, we honed a set of recommendations (and implementations steps) in a series of community meetings with Nueces County Judge Barbara Canales and

other Nueces County Commissioners. The results of this work were presented to the community, focused on the following areas:

- Transformation of the crisis response system, with a focus on integrated response to mental health emergencies through adoption of a multidisciplinary team approach.
- Local implementation of the two key services provided by the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium (CPAN for health care providers and TCHAT for schools) as well as broader expansion of telehealth.
- Expansion of assertive, intensive community services needed to reduce use of jails and emergency departments for mental health care.

- Strategic recommendations to help plan for future changes in federal funds (specifically 1115 Waiver DSRIP funding) and broader financing options.

- Creation of a leadership group led by elected and appointed officials to guide reforms over time.

In response, Nueces County hired a Director of Mental Health Programs to oversee implementation of these key recommendations.

Nueces County officials now have a better understanding of their system's capabilities and potential gaps in care and a clear roadmap toward improving care in the years to come. We continue to support their implementation efforts into 2021.

The 2021 El Paso BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

The Paso del Norte Health Foundation (Health Foundation) was formed in 1995 with the goal of improving health and preventing disease throughout its region, including the promotion of mental health and emotional well-being. In 2014, the Health Foundation funded an initial in-depth assessment of the community's behavioral health system and its stakeholder leadership, and, in the years since, the Institute has worked with the Health Foundation to build on and update the assessment.

In 2020, the Institute was asked by the Health Foundation to carry out an extensive new assessment to examine behavioral health and related service delivery systems, including

crisis response, access to care, and education and to evaluate the El Paso Behavioral Health Consortium project. The reexamination of the system also focused on care available to veterans and those involved in the justice system. The goals included examining improvements that had been implemented since the 2014 assessment and identifying what gaps might remain that need to be addressed.

Beginning in May, the Institute commenced a series of monthly meetings with the El Paso System Assessment Implementation Group, including Health Foundation representatives and selected El Paso County stakeholders, to keep them up

to date on the assessment's progress and findings. This approach fostered a crucial back-and-forth dialogue that helped keep the project laser-focused on needs specific to the community.

Throughout, we have been approaching this project through the lens of health equity, utilizing local and national input on the demographic makeup of the community, including the National Latino Behavioral Health Association, to consider issues of relevance to the community. This expertise ensured the final report includes important aspects of culture and elements of disparity that affect access to care.

The final report for this project was delivered in April 2021.



**“Determine that the thing
can and shall be done, and
THEN WE SHALL
FIND THE WAY.”**

— *Abraham Lincoln*

DEEPENING CONNECTIONS Through a Pandemic

Initiated in 2016, our award-winning Okay to Say™ mental health awareness campaign has reached millions of people across Texas and beyond, encouraging them to speak up about mental health concerns and share hope through open and honest conversations with trusted family members and friends.

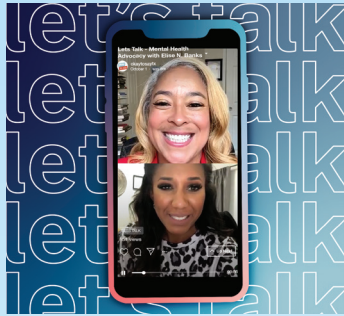
In 2020, the global pandemic forced us to pivot in our approach to inspiring hope and open discussions about mental health. Okay to Say served as a go-to source for mental health resources, encouragement, and support, helping equip our community with tools to stay mentally healthy and support loved ones during the pandemic.

Sharing Hope Through Mental Health Recovery Narratives

In January, the campaign produced a video story featuring prominent Dallas attorney Kelly Rentzel and her inner circle of mental health supporters. Kelly's inspiring story, along with information about the Okay to Say campaign, were featured in the *Dallas Morning News* column "Relapse is part of the journey: Dallas lawyer enlists colleagues to help watch for bipolar symptoms." The article was also featured in Mental Health America's national newsletter.

Creating Community and Connection Through Social Media

Kicking off in March, Okay to Say introduced a new Facebook Live and Instagram Live conversation series called *Let's Talk: Coping with COVID-19*, designed to help people stay connected while physically distancing, engage with mental health experts, and explore ways to support themselves and others during a time of increased stress. Throughout 2020, we hosted 21 conversations



across Facebook and Instagram Live, covering topics such as coping with grief, exploring faith and mental health, building resiliency in youth and teens, helping veterans transition into civilian life, mindfulness, racial trauma, COVID-19's mental health impact on law enforcement, how to be an ally to Black Americans, and navigating the holiday season.

Okay to Say's social media presence reached several significant milestones in 2020. Our social media channels grew to **more than 25,000 followers**, reflecting a 65% growth on Instagram and 18% on Facebook. Through its organic and paid content, **the campaign reached more than 1.6 million people**. Okay to Say also launched its first LinkedIn page focused on sharing stories, information, and resources related to mental health and the workplace.

Educating Families About Teens and Anxiety

In May, many families were dealing with increased stress and anxiety, especially with the move from in-person schools to virtual learning. Okay to Say and The Hackett Center for Mental Health teamed up with IndieFlix to create a free virtual screening of the documentary *Angst*, a film about teenagers and anxiety, available with seven subtitle language options. The team created a curated online dashboard that included a

family discussion guide (in English and Spanish), resource guide, and a pre-recorded interview with the film's producer. **More than 330 families participated in the virtual screenings.**

Okay to Say Girl Scout Patch Program Goes Statewide

In September, Okay to Say, in partnership with the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas, took the Okay to Say Mental Health Patch Program statewide. This patch program, which began in North Texas in 2019, is designed to help girls develop greater social and emotional confidence and learn how emotions and thoughts can impact behavior. **More than 4,000 Girl Scouts have completed the Okay to Say Mental Health patch.** The patch program has received an overwhelming amount of positive response from troop leaders and parents.

Expanding Our Reach in Workplace and Campus Communities

The Okay to Say team began work on two campaign extensions to further its reach and impact: Okay to Say in the Workplace and Okay to Say on Campus. These toolkits will support and expand on existing workplace and campus initiatives that raise mental health awareness, build support for speaking up about mental health without fear or stigma, and connect people with vetted mental health resources. The Okay to Say in the Workplace pilot program is slated kicked off in early 2021 with three companies representing more than 1,000 employees. The Okay to Say on Campus toolkit will be available in fall 2021.

Five Years of BRINGING TEXANS TOGETHER

In what has become a highly anticipated and constructive annual tradition, the Engage & Excel Conference was even more special as we celebrated the milestone of its fifth anniversary. In 2020, we virtually brought together dynamic experts and stakeholders from around the state and across the country, discussing timely and crucial topics related to mental health with nearly 300 attendees and participants. As would be expected, much of the discussion focused on responding to the increased mental health needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“COVID has exacerbated the mental health needs of Texans and people throughout the globe,” said E&E keynote speaker Michelle Alletto, Chief Program and Services Officer for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. “Social isolation, economic insecurity, and, really, what I have continued to see is just the separation from a lot of the social supports and routines that keep us healthy.”

The conference continued a focus on health equity, a topic heavily discussed in 2019, which became even more elevated in the wake of a summer of

unrest following former Texan George Floyd’s death in Minnesota. “There’s been a national dialogue that’s been energized,” Andy Keller, Ph.D., President and CEO of the Meadows Institute, told conference attendees in his opening remarks. “Last year, we had a fantastic panel discussion on health equity,” including the mention of some of the same factors that have contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic’s disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Texas Representatives Joe Moody and Four Price – the latter of whom was a speaker at the first E&E in 2016 – discussed the need for increased broadband in the state to expand the ability for people to get mental health care as quickly as possible, no matter where they might live in the state. Representative Moody also shared how people in El Paso, his home district, were still coping with the emotional fallout a year removed from a mass shooting in a local Walmart. “There is a lot of trauma in this community,” he said, “and I’ll put myself in that group.”

The conference featured 43 speakers and breakout sessions spread out over

two days, covering topics such as healing racial trauma, transforming policing, and a discussion about the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium.

Other conference participants included nationally prominent trial and civil rights attorney Roy L. Austin Jr., who participated on a panel on transforming policing; former Texas Speaker of the House Joe Straus; and Barbara Van Dahlen, Executive Director of the U.S. President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) Task Force.

With the brightest minds in mental health convened, we also officially unveiled our new visionary, innovative, and collaborative effort to end untreated depression: The Cloudbreak Initiative. Launched by the Meadows Institute and The Center for Depression Research and Clinical Care at UT Southwestern, this initiative will drive primary care-based clinical solutions across leading health systems.

Engage & Excel 2021 will once again be fully virtual, with an in-person conference planned for 2022.



ANDY KELLER



SONJA GAINES



MIKE MAPLES



STEPHANIE STEPHENS

Gratitude to our **SUPPORTERS**

We recognize and appreciate the generosity of our supporters, whose involvement makes it possible for us to do the work we do. The Institute's vision is for Texas to be the national leader in treating all people with mental health needs. We have hope for the future and are working hard to make that future happen. This support brings us closer to that vision. Thank you.

Visionary

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