

**THE KENNEDY FORUM**  
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Fifty years ago late October at the White House in Washington DC, President John F. Kennedy signed a bill authorizing \$329 million for mental health programs, called the Community Mental Health Act, into law. The Community Mental Health Act aimed to build 1,500 mental health centers so those with mental illnesses could be treated while living at home, rather than being kept in state institutions. Unfortunately, it was the very last piece of legislation that President Kennedy signed due to his untimely death. The Community Mental Health Act was landmark legislation as it closed psychiatric hospitals and drastically altered the delivery of mental health services in our country.

Many of you attended or saw previous stories about the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's (LACDMH) incredible local celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Community Mental Health Act at Kedren Community Mental Health. I was honored to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the Community Mental Health Act in Boston, Massachusetts at the Kennedy Forum Inaugural Conference. 500 participants were invited to create one common goal; our host was President John F. Kennedy's nephew, Patrick J. Kennedy.



Patrick J. Kennedy served 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives representing Rhode Island's First District. In Congress, he championed dozens of bills to increase understanding and treatment of neurological and psychiatric disorders, including the National Neurotechnology Initiative Act, the Genomics and Personalized Medicine Act, the COMBAT PTSD Act and more. In 2008, he co-authored and was the lead sponsor of the Mental Health Parity & Addiction Equity Act along with his late father Senator Edward Kennedy. The legislation known simply as Parity was signed into law in 2008. Parity provides tens of millions of Americans who were previously denied care with access to mental health treatment. After leaving Congress, Kennedy co-founded One Mind for Research dedicated to dramatic enhancements in funding.

One Mind for Research collaborated with the International Mental Health Research Organization (IMHRO) to create the Kennedy Forum, uniting the mental health community, “to honor President Kennedy’s legacy, achieve equality and improve care for those suffering from mental illness, intellectual disabilities and addictions.” The inaugural event included a gala on October 23<sup>rd</sup> with keynote addresses from Vice President Joseph Biden, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sibelius and NFL football player Brandon Marshall at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston.

Aaron Beck, Ph.D., was on-hand as the first recipient of the Kennedy Community Mental Health Award. Dr. Beck is considered the father of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Many of you are familiar with Beck’s Depression Inventory (BDI). Dr. Beck first became interested in mental illness/depression years before the Community Mental Health Act was passed as a Boston Red Sox fan during the teams’ losing years. The Boston Red Sox were winning the first game of the World Series (2013) the same evening of the gala; the good will in Boston was contagious.

The full-day conference was the next day on October 24<sup>th</sup> at the Westin Copley Square in downtown Boston. The opening plenary session *How History Regards the Community Mental Health Act* examined how President Kennedy’s initiative fit into the history of federal activity in serving people with mental disabilities and how it set the tone for action in the decades since it became law. The five panelists had a lively discussion focusing on what worked, what did not work, and, perhaps most importantly, the lessons we can apply to future efforts. Panelists included: Steven M. Eidelman, H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Human Services Policy and Leadership and Faculty Director, The National Consortium on Developmental Disabilities, University of Delaware; David Gergen, Senior Political Analyst, CNN, Professor of Public Service and Director of the Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School; Howard Goldman, M.D., Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry, University of Maryland School of Medicine; Herbert Pardes, M.D., Executive Vice Chair, New York Presbyterian Hospital; and Joe Shapiro, Correspondent, Investigations Unit, National Public Radio. The

panelists touched on how California's Mental Health Services Act certainly could not have come into existence without President's Kennedy Community Mental Health Act. The breakout sessions were next.

The first breakout session *Promise and Potential in Prevention and Early Intervention Programs* explored approaches to prevention and early intervention (PEI) for mental illnesses, addictions, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. The five panelists considered the range of issues that must be addressed to craft policies that encouraged PEI including financing, regulatory, organization, and clinical and ethical challenges. Panelists included: William Beardslee, M.D., Director, Preventive Intervention Project, Judge Baker Children's Center; Mary Jane England, M.D., Professor, Chair Ad Interim, Boston University School of Public Health; Arthur Evans, Ph.D., Commissioner, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services; Michael Gamel-McCormick, Ph.D., Disability and Education Policy Analyst, US Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; and Brandon Staglin, Communications Director, Staglin Family Vineyard and IMHRO.



The next breakout session was *Community Approaches, We're All in This Together* which placed heavy emphasis on how mental health, addiction and intellectual disability affect the lives of everyone in the community, and the whole community has a stake in how these disabilities are addressed. As these disorders touch lives in such fundamental ways, they involve basic social institutions and the way affected populations interact with those institutions. The five panelists included: Elaine Abelaye-Mateo, Consultant, Everyday Impact Consulting; Chelsea Clinton, Vice Chair, Clinton Foundation; Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and Executive Director, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; Steven Sharfstein, M.D., President and Chief Executive Officer, Sheppard Pratt Health System; and Ashbel T. Wall, II, Director, Rhode Island Department of Corrections.

In *Securing Policy and Practice Advances: Monitoring and Measuring Progress* panelists considered current policy advances that build on JFK's initiative. A thorough, detailed conversation focused on what we should look for in policy implementation and how we know we're succeeding. Additionally, panelists discussed what the threats are to success, what outcomes to measure and how to prepare for unintended consequences. This was a very technical breakout session.

The exciting day ended with closing session *Setting the Agenda to Further President Kennedy's Vision*. The six panelists were Pamela Hyde, J.D., Administrator, SAMHSA; Jeffrey Lieberman, M.D., President, American Psychiatric Association; Lawrence C. Kolb Professor and Chair, Columbia University; Linda Rosenberg, M.S.W., President and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health; David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Satcher Health Leadership Institute, Morehouse School of Medicine, 16<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the United States; Gordon Smith, President and CEO, National Association of Broadcasters; and Madeline Will, Co-Founder and Chief Policy Officer, The Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination. The policy leaders discussed the ways in which President Kennedy's vision remains relevant to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities, mental health disorders, and substance use problems. The speakers built on the morning's breakout sessions, and then further identified many issues for the community to address as we re-dedicated ourselves to the principles of the Community Mental Health Act.

Brandon Marshall



Vice President Joe Biden with Congressman Kennedy



Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sibelius



President Kennedy signs Community Mental Health Act



Much has been accomplished since 1963 but much more remains to be done. The Kennedy Forum is proud to continue that effort and embark on a new era of achievement in community mental health policy.

