

Just as President Kennedy rallied the nation to dream big and set audacious goals 50 years ago, The Kennedy Forum in Illinois is working toward lasting change in the way mental health and addictions are considered and treated.

OUR VISION

A future where all persons are treated with dignity and receive the person-centered mental and physical care and support they need to thrive and achieve their goals; with a health system that fully recognizes that the brain is part of the body.

OUR MISSION

End stigma against mental health and substance use disorders. We are focused on changing both attitudes and practice.

OUR WORK

- Elevate and improve the quality of the public discourse and mass media coverage of mental health and addiction;
- Ensure equal access and coverage of mental health and substance use disorder care;
- Advance integration and coordination of behavioral health care and prevention into the general primary care medical system;
- Leverage innovation and technology to advance and improve mental health/addiction interventions and integration;
- Give children the best chance to succeed in life by addressing brain health at an early age.

Nine out of ten Illinois **adults agree that there is a negative stigma associated with mental health conditions.** A majority of Illinois adults “strongly agree” with this premise.



62% STRONGLY AGREE

28% TOTAL AGREE

8% TOTAL DISAGREE

WHAT IS STIGMA?

Stigma is a complex social process involving many parts, all of which work together to marginalize and disenfranchise people with mental illness and substance use disorders. Stigma is enacted at three levels: self-stigma; public stigma and structural stigma.

- **Self-stigma** occurs when people with mental health challenges, including substance use disorders, accept and agree with negative cultural stereotypes. They feel ashamed, blameworthy, and try to conceal their illness from others. This may include avoiding situations that may elicit stigmatizing responses. Stigma avoidance is thought to be one of the key reasons why the majority of people who meet the criteria for a mental illness do not seek care.
- **Public stigma** encompasses the prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors expressed toward people with a mental illness or addiction by members of the public. Public stigma is based on deeply held prejudices that are, by definition, resistant to change. Cultural attributions that fuel public stigma include the ideas that people with a mental illness can never recover; they are violent and unpredictable; they are blameworthy and could control their illness.
- **Structural stigma** occurs at the level of institutions, policies, and laws. It creates situations in which people with a mental illness and addiction are treated inequitably and unfairly; for example when they are denied their basic human rights, or when policy agendas do not give mental health issues high priority.

The Kennedy Forum in Illinois is guided by a strong Leadership Council, comprised of the following members:

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Dr. John Csernansky, Chair, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine

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*Peter O'Brien, President, MADO Healthcare

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*Samantha Olds Frey, Executive Director, Illinois Association of Medicaid Health Plans

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**Denotes Steering Committee member*