

## THE SOZOSEI FOUNDATION GLOBAL SOLUTION LAB MEETING REPORT

JUNE 2021

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mental illness is an area that has been relatively underfunded by philanthropy when compared to the immense potential for impact. The Sozosei Foundation is helping reignite energy and push the philanthropic community in this area, with a specific focus on decriminalizing mental illness in America.

The Foundation recently kicked off a series of Global Solution Labs to surface more knowledge and perspectives about how to create a future where mental illness is not treated as a crime. Over 50 multi-disciplinary “Solutionists” gathered on May 7, 2021, to take on the ambitious task of identifying the top solutions to move the needle on the decriminalization of mental illness. The group included doctors, judges, academics, philanthropic leaders, people with lived experiences, and other experts on mental health and criminal justice.

The top solutions (with the latter two being tied for third) were:

1. Scale evidence-based diversion practices and centers of excellence
2. Support planning and implementation of 988, the national mental health crisis hotline
3. Increase the size of the workforce
4. Support the passage of Medicaid Reentry Act

The Solutionists encouraged the Sozosei Foundation to collaborate and align with public and private sector players and ensure it casts a wide net of voices to include in its discovery process. The Foundation found the input invaluable, is honored to be in community with the talented Solutionists, and looks forward to hosting additional Global Solution Labs in the near future.

## ABOUT THE SOZOSEI FOUNDATION

The Sozosei Foundation is a national foundation established in 2019 as the philanthropic arm of Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc. The Foundation takes a creative and data-driven approach to philanthropy. It supports existing evidence-based programs and innovative new ideas, and it aims to help expand the evidence

base of what works, for whom, and why. Through convenings and programming, The Foundation engages in constant dialogue with stakeholders and supports the programs and practices that have the highest potential to move the needle in order to decriminalize mental illness.

## THE SOZOSEI FOUNDATION FOCUS: DECRIMINALIZING MENTAL ILLNESS

In the U.S., the legal justice system plays the inappropriate role of mental health provider for far too many people.<sup>1</sup> Despite great advances in understanding and treating mental illness, people with mental health issues face stigma and a lack of access to appropriate care. These challenges have a disproportionate impact on people of color.

In addition, the current system fails to achieve parity between mental and physical healthcare, to fund evidence-based prevention and intervention for people with mental illness, and to guarantee access to a full continuum of community-based mental health services. This has resulted in poor health outcomes, higher recidivism rates, and higher costs for taxpayers and governments.<sup>2</sup>

Mental health is an area that has been relatively underfunded by philanthropy when compared to the immense potential for impact. It can be high risk work but its great potential for high reward spans many other areas of interest to funders

such as education and labor market outcomes.<sup>3</sup> The Sozosei Foundation recognizes the complex and interconnected universe within which the decriminalization of mental illness lives and has made an intentional decision to be laser focused on the issue. It is using its culture of learning and discipline to help reignite energy and push the philanthropic community because it knows we can and must do better.

Through its grantmaking and convening ability, the Sozosei Foundation aims to:

- create mechanisms for leaders to learn, share, connect, and scale fresh ideas and best practices;
- decrease stigma against those with mental illness and ensure the re-medicalization of psychiatry;
- eliminate the use of the criminal legal system as a default mental health provider; and
- ensure access to quality, community-based mental health treatment.

<sup>1</sup> See *Mental Health by the Numbers*, National Alliance for Mental Illness, <https://nami.org/mhstats>

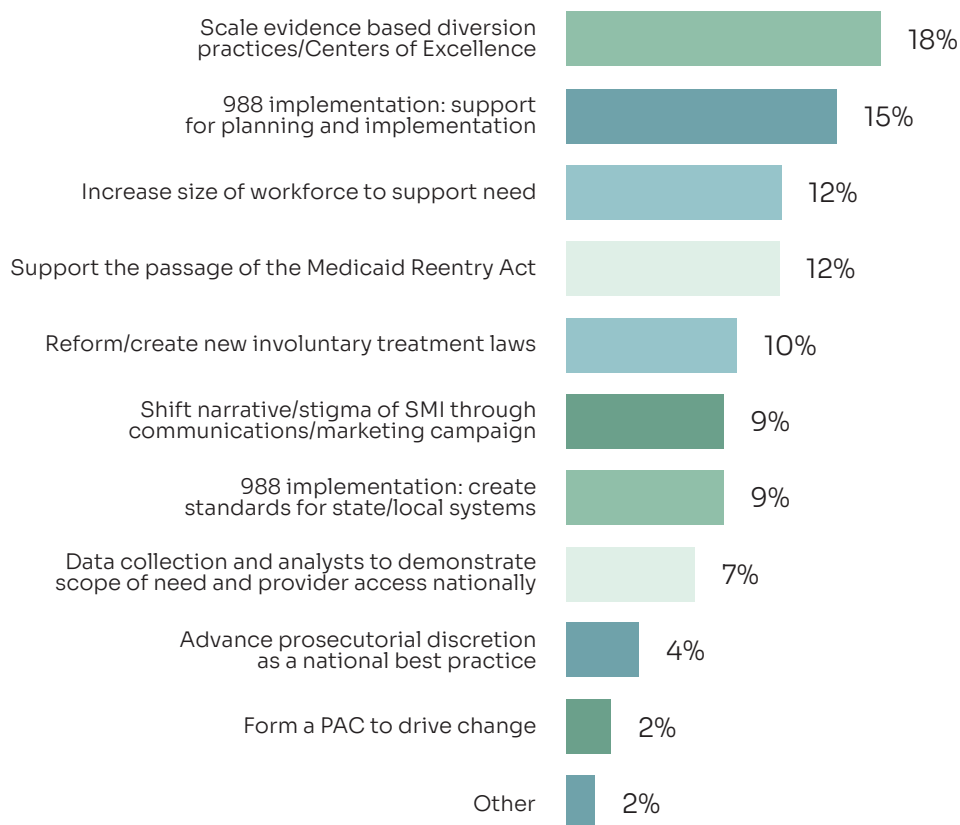
<sup>2</sup> *NACo-NSA Joint Taskforce Report, Addressing the Federal Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy*, <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/naco-nsa-joint-task-force-report-addressing-federal-medicaid-inmate-exclusion-policy>.

<sup>3</sup> *Health In Mind, A Philanthropic Guide for Mental Health and Addiction*, The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkits/health-in-mind>

## THE SOZOSEI FOUNDATION GLOBAL SOLUTION LABS

The Sozosei Foundation recently kicked off a series of global Solution Labs to surface more knowledge and perspectives about how to create a future where mental illness is not treated as a crime. On May 7, 2021, over 50 multi-disciplinary “Solutionists” gathered to take on the ambitious task of surfacing the top three solutions to move the needle on the decriminalization of mental illness. The group included doctors, judges, academics, philanthropic leaders, people with lived experiences, and other experts on mental health and criminal justice.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the convening, Solutionists each submitted ideas of the most promising actionable solutions, which ranged from influencing policy change, to shifting cultural narratives, to building integrated data systems, to improving training programs. Once gathered together, the Solutionists were invited to weigh in on Sozosei’s grantmaking strategy and provide input for the broader philanthropic field and, from the ideas submitted, voted on the top solutions.



The solutions favored by the group (with the latter two being tied for third) were as follows:

1. Scale evidence-based diversion practices and centers of excellence.
2. Support planning and implementation of 988, the national mental health hotline.
3. Increase the size of the workforce.
4. Support the passage of Medicaid Reentry Act.

In smaller breakout groups, the Solutionists offered further thoughts on the top four solutions, with a majority of the discussion focused on scaling evidence-based practices and centers of excellence and 988. The Solutionists encouraged the Sozosei Foundation to collaborate and align with public and private sector players and ensure it casts a wide net of voices to include in its discovery process.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix for a full list of Solutionists.

## **SCALE EVIDENCE-BASED DIVERSION PRACTICES AND CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE.**

Multiple Solutionists emphasized the role that the Sozosei Foundation could play in joining with other funders to help build the field and scale best practices. Others underscored data as the great enabler of better policymaking and funding and the need to more clearly define success metrics and building shared data systems. A group of Solutionists cautioned that an over focus on “evidence-based” could preclude new ideas and

lead to boutique solutions, cutting against the urgency of the situation and those most in need. For example, researcher Leah Pope noted “I think it would be helpful for the Sozosei Foundation to focus on supporting “evidence-ready” solutions and help expand the evidence base in this area. How do we help organizations up their data sophistication game so we have more stakeholders contributing to the evidence base?”

## **SUPPORT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF 988, THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH HOTLINE.**

Solutionists were energized around 988 and emphasized that it presents a real and rare opportunity to transform crisis care while simultaneously bringing a new found urgency to building a continuum and integrated healthcare approach. The group discussed how 988 is a vehicle to the solution but not the solution itself and that there is still a great deal to figure out around its implementation. Solutionists encouraged the Sozosei Foundation to think about deploying its resources to support the creation of a precise agenda and strategy so the federal money does not go to waste and does not result in 51 different models at the federal and state level. “With the enactment of 988, we have a really exciting opportunity to harness the moment and generate a real plan to ensure 988 is meaningful and moves us

in the right direction to support every single person who needs care.” said Dr. Tom Insel, a psychiatrist, neuroscientist, and former Director of the National Institute of Mental Health. The group surfaced the need to build local capacity for stakeholders who want to use the federal dollars and address the “divert to what?” aspect more adequately given the current system often fails to connect individuals to proper support when they return to their communities. One Solutionist encouraged the Sozosei Foundation to focus on solving for the highest utilizers, noting the amount of resources that would become available if that population has better care. Another Solutionist pointed out that 911 was started by philanthropy and should be used as a case study to learn and improve with 988.

## **INCREASE THE SIZE OF THE WORKFORCE.**

Solutionists emphasized the need to build a new and more dynamic workforce that wants to do crisis care (as well as mental health care more generally), and to ensure that the crisis workforce has the training, support, and skills required to do the work.

One Solutionist stated that the professionals in the field also need increased pay to keep them in it and attract others who are often deterred from crisis care because of low salaries.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

“There was great enthusiasm in the Lab, the conversation could have continued for hours. The Sozosei Foundation is deeply grateful to all of the Solutionists who joined us and appreciate the varying perspectives that were shared. We look forward to testing some of these hypothesis through our work in the coming months and years ahead,”

said Dr. William H. Carson, M.D., Chair of the Sozosei Board of Directors. Melissa M. Beck, Esq., Executive Director of Sozosei added “The Foundation is poised to continuously learn, improve, and cocreate more evidence with our first cohort of Solutionists as well as future Lab participants.”

# MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT A CRIME™

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The Sozosei Foundation will host more Solution Labs in the coming months. To express interest and share ideas, please email [info@sozosei.org](mailto:info@sozosei.org). In the meantime, please visit [www.SozoseiFoundation.org](http://www.SozoseiFoundation.org) to stay informed about upcoming events and funding opportunities.