



New Campaign Urges Policymakers to Support Mental Health Check-Ups for America's Youth

Leading national organizations and mtvU kick off the CheckUp08 Campaign for mental health care reform

For Immediate Release – On September 10, 2008, seven of the nation's leading mental health organizations will launch CheckUp08 – a campaign calling on elected officials and this year's Presidential candidates to endorse mental health check-ups for every young American. The coalition's founding partners, Columbia University TeenScreen Program and The Jed Foundation, are joined by Active Minds, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Mental Health America, National Alliance on Mental Illness, and The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA, in this effort.

The CheckUp08 Campaign is building a coalition of supporters in Washington, in the medical community, and at a grassroots level through communication efforts, events, and online advocacy. Additionally, mtvU, MTV's national college network broadcast on over 750 campuses, will engage college-age advocates in this effort through its Peabody Award-winning Half of Us campaign, which aims to reduce the student suicide rate, fight the stigma of mental health on college campuses and connect students and their friends to the resources and help they need. The public can learn more about the CheckUp08 Campaign and sign an online petition at www.checkup08.org.

Two-thirds of youth and young adults who have a mental disorder do not get the help that they need. Over 21 million young people visited a healthcare professional last year, but only one out of five were asked about their mental health. One in ten children and adolescents suffer from a mental illness, and suicide is a leading cause of death in this age group.

"Healthcare is at the forefront of the national dialogue this election year," says TeenScreen Executive Director Laurie Flynn, "but any discussion of healthcare reform is incomplete without seriously addressing the early identification of youth mental illness as a life-saving and life-altering measure."

"Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students and a preventable tragedy that affects far too many families -- mental health check-ups have the potential to improve the overall wellness of our young people and prevent the worse consequences of unaddressed mental illness," says Donna Satow, a vocal advocate for suicide prevention, who founded The Jed Foundation with her husband after the loss of their youngest son to suicide.

Federal and state governments already play a pivotal role in a range of prevention efforts to protect the health of young Americans including child immunizations, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, and diabetes and nutrition education. The CheckUp08 Campaign is urging elected officials and those running for federal and state offices to include mental health check-ups and suicide prevention as part of their healthcare platforms and policy discussions.

The importance of early detection and prevention in mental health has already received significant bi-partisan support in the U.S. House and Senate as a means to promoting total wellness and was also recommended as an important prevention measure in the 2003 President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. Elected officials, such as Senators Gordon Smith (R-OR) and Pete Domenici (R-NM), Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), and Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), have long encouraged their colleagues to back mental health and suicide prevention initiatives for young Americans, including early detection.

Senator Smith, who lost his son Garrett to suicide, says, "Mental illness doesn't care if you're rich or poor, from a loving family or a broken home. The only thing that matters is diagnosing the problem early and getting treatment to those who need it in time to make a difference." Congresswoman DeLauro adds, "We've accepted that it is good public health policy to make sure every child is vaccinated. Now we must do the same and make sure every child receives a mental health check-up. That's also good public health policy."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For additional information on youth suicide prevention, mental health, and how to become involved in the CheckUp08 Campaign, visit: www.checkup08.org

Founding Organizations:

Columbia University TeenScreen Program – <http://www.mentalhealthcheckups.org/>

The Jed Foundation – www.jedfoundation.org

Partnering Organizations/Supporters:

Active Minds – www.activeminds.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – www.afsp.org

Mental Health America – www.nmha.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness – www.nami.org

The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA – www.spanusa.org

mtvU's Half of Us Campaign – www.halfofus.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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