

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2020

Media Contact: [press@texasstateofmind.org](mailto:press@texasstateofmind.org)

## **MMHPI Report: Direct Correlation Between COVID Recession and Increased Rate of Suicide, Substance Abuse**

AUSTIN - The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) today issued the first in a series of reports analyzing the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first report focuses on how an economic recession could increase rates of mental health and substance use disorders (MHSUD) and result in deaths from suicide and substance overdoses.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented change to the lives of people in every county across our state, and, sadly, the stress and pain for many Texans will not end when the immediate risk to life from the pandemic subsides,” said MMHPI President and CEO Andy Keller, PhD. “Mitigating and treating the threat of this virus was the right immediate public health focus, and now we must prepare for a second wave of the pandemic involving ‘diseases of despair,’ especially depression and addiction. Fortunately, these are very treatable diseases if we increase readiness now to detect and treat them, so we can care for the mental health of Texans in the months ahead, as well as through our long-term recovery efforts.”

In Texas, MMHPI’s models project that – absent an increase in preparedness to detect and treat depression and addiction – every five percentage point annual increase in the unemployment rate could result in 300 additional lives lost to suicide each year and 425 additional lives lost to drug overdoses. In 2018, over 3,800 Texans died from suicide and over 7,000 died from substance-related deaths.

Nationally, the MMHPI models project that for every five percent increase in the unemployment rate, an unemployment rate on par with the 2007-2009 recession, over a year we could lose 4,000 more Americans to suicide and 4,800 to overdose, as well as 600,000 more people who will suffer from addiction more broadly. A deeper economic recession similar in magnitude to the Great Depression could lead to 18,000 more lost to suicide and more than 22,000 to drug overdose.

The report also notes that rates of depression and addiction will be many times higher than the number of deaths. Furthermore, rates of mental illness more broadly are likely to increase over time, given that most mental health impacts of trauma manifest 60 to 90 days following exposure to traumatic events, though the sustained and unpredictable length of the COVID-19 pandemic stressors may change that pattern. These effects can continue to significantly manifest for years, as seen following Hurricane Harvey.

The entire report can be found at:

<https://www.texasstateofmind.org/uploads/whitepapers/COVID-MHSUDImpacts.pdf>.

Organizations sharing data from this report should be mindful of the potential effects of misreporting information on suicide and overdose deaths on people at-risk for such outcomes and follow national guidelines on reporting published by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention that can be found at:

<https://www.datocms-assets.com/12810/1577098744-13763toptennotesreportingonsuicideflyerm1.pdf>

Regarding the MMHPI models, Dr. Keller added: “All public health models oversimplify the world and are therefore inaccurate to some degree, but some models can have utility by helping us prepare for the types and potential magnitudes of risks we face. Hopefully this model will be wrong because we get people the help they need. We know that depression, addiction, and suicide are all treatable if we are ready to provide effective care to people when they seek it, particularly at the point in the system people tend most to ask for help: the family doctor.”

Additionally, steps taken now to practice self-care and care for others can help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on emotional health, such as establishing a new daily routine or staying connected with friends and family through technology. And those in need of more support should reach out to a primary care or mental health provider, community health program, online support organization, or peer network for help.

Resources for individuals in crisis or in need of support include:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text Line: Text “HELP” to 741741

- Texas Health and Human Services Statewide COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free: 833-986-1919
- Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990 or Text “TalkWithUs” to 66746

### **About MMHPI**

Since its public launch in 2014, MMHPI has helped Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local leaders identify systemic mental health needs and solutions, quickly becoming Texas’s most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Institute has begun to make a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas leaders expand the mental health workforce, improve access to care for veterans and their families, shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. Learn more at [www.texasstateofmind.org](http://www.texasstateofmind.org).

###