

Partners in Mental Health Initiative: Stakeholder Report 2025



Overview

The PArtners in Mental Health Steering Committee met on June 29-July 1, 2025 in Johns Creek, Georgia. The Steering Committee is composed of PA organization leaders and grassroots mental health champions, both Board Certified PAs and interprofessional partners. The meeting's purpose was to support the initiative's goal to effect systemic change that improves the nation's health by advancing the roles of PAs and strengthening partnerships to address issues impacting mental health and substance use disorders (SUD). The meeting served as forum for envisioning strategies to amplify all PA efforts to address mental health for patients and providers. Further, the Steering Committee seeks to elevate the work of PAs and this movement by highlighting activities and sharing opportunities for collaboration.

As the convener, the nccPA Health Foundation leveraged the meeting location to connect the Steering Committee with the Will to Live Foundation, a local organization that serves as a resource for teens, young adults, and their families, in the fight against suicide, depression, and the stigma surrounding mental illness. The presentation grounded the Steering Committee in its purpose.

Working Sessions Drive Content Creation

Collective impact is a social change strategy that suggests organizational partners and grassroots champions conduct mutually reinforcing activities through top-down and bottom-up action to support a common purpose. Since 2016, the Steering Committee has leveraged this strategy to foster a body of work that supports PA efforts to address mental and behavioral health. To expand its contribution, the Steering Committee expressed a desire to collaboratively identify and create content that could be shared through the PA partner organizations or the nccPA Health Foundation's partnership with *Psychiatric Times*.

The Steering Committee identified six potential focus areas. The Steering Committee recognized resilience as a cross-cutting theme and acknowledged the impact of cultural norms, traditions, and generational expectations on the experience of mental health and wellness. Ultimately, the Steering Committee worked in small groups to describe and envision potential activities in each focus areas, which are included below with no rank or priority.

- **Mental Health in Primary Care (and Additional Specialties):** Every diagnosis has a psychiatric component. PAs are educated as generalists, equipped to manage comorbidities, and committed to whole-person care, which collectively support their efforts to bridge gaps in mental health care. Framing integration efforts related to quality of life may increase PA awareness and confidence. Integration may encourage providers to build a 'professional village' to support these efforts and may reduce stigma and mitigate fears about addressing mental health. Evidence to guide efforts may include comorbidity data and wait time disparities for primary vs. psychiatric care appointments. Ideas to support integration may be discipline-specific articles, podcasts, CME abstracts, and toolkits.
- **Lifestyle Psychiatry:** Lifestyle psychiatry centers on modifiable behaviors: how patients eat, sleep, move, connect and cope (stress management and substance use reduction), as both contributors to and potential treatments for mental illness. Based on how each behavior contributes to health, lifestyle psychiatry posits complementary, but non-medical and non-therapy, interventions to support mental health and overall wellness. It responds to the increased incidence of chronic disease where lifestyle factors may have a more prominent role (compared to acute care). Opportunities in this space may need to address both knowledge and confidence gaps and may include a series of articles and educational resources examining each behavior's impact on mental health.
- **Suicide Prevention:** Every PAs has a role in suicide prevention. PAs can counter stigma and shame with neutral and inclusive language that fosters safe spaces for patients and fellow providers to share concerns. The need for enhanced education that dispels suicide myths and increases familiarity regarding risk factors, safety planning, social support, and

strategies for building resilience (e.g., how to redirect negative thoughts) was noted. Audiences may include PAs, PA students, and health care providers as well as the general population. Opportunities may include developing articles, safety cards, and CME abstracts; educating and creating a network of peers and colleagues to share content; and exploring partnerships with patient-focused and interprofessional groups.

- **Curriculum Focus:** PA students are a captive audience and must be equipped to meet patients where they are relative to mental wellness. With the demands of PA education, opportunities to increase mental and behavioral health focus should be integrated into coursework. Opportunities may include increased focus on counseling strategies (e.g., motivational interviewing, cognitive-behavioral therapy), mental and physical health integration, and the importance of language and communication skills. Initial ideas include collaborating with PA educators to foster integration in OSCEs, developing educational videos that illustrate patient interactions, and building frameworks that map integrated mental and behavioral health content.
- **Children & Adolescent Mental Health:** The evidence and impact of poor mental health in children and adolescents is well-documented as is the need to remove stigma. The opportunity for increased education and training regarding strategies to build resilience and coping skills for youths (and how clinicians can teach these skills) was emphasized. Those foundational skills may ameliorate the impact of future experiences for youths, adolescents, and young adults. Opportunities to extend the reach of these efforts may be through partnerships with schools and other organizations that support youths.
- **Envisioned Future: Workforce development and entrepreneurship:** An envisioned future whereby PAs expand access to mental health care may shape the profession's efforts to do so and its concept of mental health as part of overall wellness. Moreover, an envisioned future may inform the mental health workforce, policymakers, payers, regulators, educators, and others. Such efforts could explore educational curriculum, including fellowship and residency options; practice modernization efforts; licensing, credentialing, and reimbursement; practice ownership; and entrepreneurship. Self-reported data provided by PAs to the national PA organizations as well as claims and other data may help concretize the current understanding of PA contributions in this space and inform development of a white paper.

As first steps, Steering Committee members volunteered to develop a lifestyle psychiatry primer, to submit abstracts regarding the PA role in suicide prevention for the 2026 AAPA conference, and to explore a manuscript related to the PA role in suicide prevention. These items were in addition to podcast episodes and interviews recorded during the meeting; see the box (at right) for completed deliverables. As activities are completed, topics may be revisited; and additional opportunities may be identified from this aspirational list.

2025 Deliverables Completed

- **[PAs in Psychiatry: A Win-Win for Patients and Practices](#)** by Steering Committee member Dawn Morton-Rias was published online by *Psychiatric Times*. The original article underscored the critical role of PAs to address health care shortages in psychiatry; described the profession's medical education model and accreditation and certification standards; and illustrated PAs' commitments to adaptability and continuous learning to expand access and provide comprehensive patient care.
- **PA Perspectives in Psychiatry Podcast** Steering Committee members Todd Allen and Jay Somers participated in a PA Insights podcast powered by NCCPA. In [Episode 1](#), they shared the unique pathways that brought them to psychiatry. In [Episode 2](#), their conversation explored whole person medicine, how PAs integrate physical and mental health, how PAs collaborate with care teams, and how PAs find fulfillment in this meaningful field.
- **CME Panel Presented at AAPA 2025** An outgrowth of 2024 discussions, Steering Committee members Todd Allen, Peter Carmany, Erin Crown, and Terri Langford participated in a panel discussion at the AAPA Conference. This 'day-in-the-life' of a psychiatry PA presentation answered questions about what practice in psychiatry looks like, how PA education prepares PAs for practice in psychiatry, what opportunities are on the horizon, and more.
- **CME Abstracts Submitted for AAPA 2026** Steering Committee members Adrienne Colabuno, Catherine Judd, and Tajuana Lordeus collaborated on three abstracts focused on the PA role of in suicide prevention. One abstract was accepted.
- **Mental Health Minute Series** Steering Committee members shared perspectives on the role of PAs and their contributions in the mental and behavioral health space. The nccPA Health Foundation is producing and sharing this content on its social media and [website](#).
- **[PA Finds Lifestyle Changes Complementary Tools for Mental Health Care](#)**: Steering Committee member Jay Somers shared in NCCPA's December newsletter how all PAs can empower patients to be partners in the mental health by leveraging lifestyle psychiatry.

Updates and Insights

The meeting provides participants with the opportunity to share accomplishments, plans, and lived experiences, in line with Steering Committee's commitment to collective impact. The following highlights were shared:

- **AAPA/PA Foundation:** AAPA continues to advance mental health as a [national health priority](#). AAPA provides educational opportunities, including psychiatry-focused sessions at the annual conference, an InNetwork CME program, a free CME on Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral for Eating Disorders, a Neuropsychiatric Symptoms associated with Alzheimer's Disease toolkit, and the Psych Congress PA Institute, in partnership with HMP Global. For its PAs Go Beyond program, AAPA shares stories from PAs that focus on psychiatry and mental health. AAPA's research grant program includes a mental health focus area, and AAPA shared plans for the PA Insights Network, a survey panel to solicit PA feedback.
- **APAP:** APAP highlighted efforts for the inaugural PA Institute, including the availability of scholarships for complimentary registration, and for a meet and greet at Psych Congress 2025. APAP noted the emergence of certificate programs in psychiatry and the opportunity to promote nontraditional educational programs. Finally, APAP shared ongoing efforts to enhance its website as a professional resource and to foster increased engagement and new volunteers.
- **ARC-PA:** The 6th edition of the *Standards* received tremendous feedback and leans into behavioral health. The [6th edition](#) (effective September 1, 2025) continues to include requirements for didactic instruction in psychiatric and behavioral health, counseling, and a behavioral health SCPE; adds a requirement for didactic instruction in telehealth; and continues the curriculum requirement relative to maintaining personal wellness, prevention of impairment, and prevention of burnout.
- **NCCPA:** Leveraging its data, NCCPA increases awareness of and amplifies the role of Board Certified PAs to address mental health through its statistical reports; its posters and manuscripts; and its communications vehicles, including its newsletter, podcasts, etc. Psychiatry and behavioral science content is included in the certifying examination and recertifying assessment; and as requested, NCCPA continues to offer a Certificate of Added Qualifications (CAQ) in psychiatry.
- **nccPA Health Foundation:** The Health Foundation convenes and supports the Steering Committee. In addition, the Health Foundation curates a [resource center](#); presents a CME slide deck; administers an [outreach grant](#); and raises awareness through a variety of mechanisms. Finally, the Health Foundation fosters outreach to the mental health workforce through its participation at Psych Congress, its strategic alliance partnership with *Psychiatric Times*, and its ongoing exploration of opportunities with interprofessional and patient-facing organizations. *Board Certified PA Tajuana Lordeus*, who serves concurrently as a member of the Health Foundation Board and as a psychiatry PA champion, shared her community outreach efforts, including her work with NAMI North Carolina to increase the visibility of PAs in psychiatry and her role as the lead planner for a Communities in Mental Health Summit in Raleigh, North Carolina.
- **PAEA:** Partnership and advocacy drive efforts. PAEA supports the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act, which would reauthorize the SUD Workforce Loan Repayment program that includes PAs and was first passed in 2018. PAEA supports the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act, and advocacy efforts seek to secure inclusion of PAs. Finally, PAEA is monitoring potential changes by the Department of Health and Human Services related to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) and how any changes may impact grants available for PAs.
- **Champions:** *Board Certified PA Todd Allen* shared his practice at a state mental hospital, outpatient clinic, and in addiction medicine. He amplified his passion for precepting PA students, his efforts to encourage students to choose careers in psychiatry, and his participation in the Steering Committee's panel at the AAPA Conference. *Board Certified PA Adrienne Colabuno* is a PA educator who has led efforts to integrate mental health initiatives at her PA program, including incorporating Mental Health First Aid training and psychiatric interviewing as part of a telemedicine course. *Board Certified PA Jay Somers* owns his practice. He noted serving on the PA Institute Steering Committee, presenting lectures at the American Psychiatric Association (APA) conference, work on a lifestyle psychiatry white paper with APA, and teaching responsibilities in postgraduate programs with a psychiatry focus. He shared his ongoing interests in professional fulfillment and artificial intelligence in medicine and psychiatry. *PA-Psychiatrist Team Peter Carmany and Terri Langford, MD*, highlighted their hospital-affiliated, integrated care model, while underscoring challenges and resistance to their efforts, which may impact their ability to precept students. They shared an innovation to provide therapy lamps for patients as a treatment for seasonal affective disorder, noted opportunities to raise awareness with the New Mexico Academy of PAs, and shared how encouraged they were by participating in the panel at the AAPA Conference. Finally, they amplified the continuing importance of counseling and therapy experiences for PAs.

The Steering Committee recognized partners' and champions' perspectives as essential to providing context that fosters the continued growth and evolution of this movement.

Supporting the Movement

The Steering Committee concluded by recognizing the evolution of this ten-year movement, noting a growing body of work, increased inclusion of PAs, and opportunities ahead. They noted progress made through small, iterative processes and repeated peer-to-peer interactions in support of shared goals. Participants reviewed proposed deliverables and expressed gratitude for the meeting's two-part approach: Sharing partners' and champions' efforts and engaging in generative activities that supported content creation. Participants recognized the importance of dedicating time and space to these efforts and noted renewed purpose. Plans for a mid-cycle update and a 2026 meeting were shared. Participants acknowledged the nccPA Health Foundation's role in supporting this group as well as the sustained engagement of organizational partners and grassroots champions, which is integral to the movement's impact. To stay apprised of these efforts, share your contact information with the nccPA Health Foundation at ContactUs@nccPAHealthFoundation.net.

Participants

The nccPA Health Foundation thanks individuals for their participation at this meeting:

Todd Allen, MBA, MMS, PA-C, CAQ-Psychiatry

Annual Meeting Chair

PA Champion

State of Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, State Hospital South

Heather Brown, DMSc, PA-C, DFAAPA

Accreditation Director II

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PA Education Association

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PA Champion

Nevada Family Psychiatry

Although unable to attend the meeting, the nccPA Health Foundation acknowledges the additional contributions of members:

Erin C. Crown, MHSPAS, PA-C, CAQ-Psychiatry

Immediate Past Chair, nccPA Health Foundation

Managing Member, Oasis LifeCare, LLC

Zeno W. St. Cyr, II, MPH, Steering Committee Chair

Retired, US Department of Health & Human Services Board Member, NCCPA*

*Zeno W. St. Cyr, II, served concurrently on the nccPA Health Foundation Board.