

Transforming Mental Health and Addiction Services

The National Academy of Medicine convened the Vital Directions for Health and Health Care: Priorities for 2021 initiative which, following a 2016 initiative of the same name, aims to provide expert guidance to the new presidential administration and nation on several focus areas for U.S. health policy. The following highlights the Vital Directions 2021 article on mental health and addiction services, published in Health Affairs in January 2021. Visit nam.edu/VitalDirections for more information.

Overarching Challenges for U.S. Mental Health and Addiction Services

For the past 50 years, the model for care and advocacy in the mental health and addiction, or behavioral health (BH), field has resulted in unmet needs and persistently poor BH outcomes,

Social context contributes to negative mental health outcomes and greater prevalence of SUD. BH outcomes can be improved with structural

2. Accountability measures need to focus on outcomes, at both the individual and population levels.
3. Social services should be integrated within BH clinical care, including through value-based payment models.
4. Cross-sector collaboration is needed to aggregate funds from multiple agencies outside of federal and state health care agencies, as care for individuals is multifactorial and often contingent on issues outside of traditional medical care.
5. Public health agencies should be able to track the effectiveness of their BH systems by linking patients' clinical outcome data and using analyses to target investments for system improvement.