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## News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **NC Physician Groups Address the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health**

RALEIGH – The COVID-19 pandemic’s negative impact on the nation’s mental health is not likely to abate even after the pandemic is over. Now is the time not only to help those currently in crisis, but also to plan for better access to mental health services in the future.

The pandemic has exacerbated already high rates of mental illness and substance use. In North Carolina, this is playing out in emergency departments where overall visits are down, but, of those visits, there has been a significant increase in patients needing psychiatric care.

“Just as the pandemic has highlighted racial inequities in our health system, so, too, has it shed light on the dire need for greater access to mental health care,” said **NCMS President Philip Brown, Jr., MD**. “We have an opportunity now – an obligation, really -- to be innovative and forward looking in order to address people’s mental health needs as well as their physical health needs now and in the future.”

Studies, like the [recent report by the Kaiser Family Foundation](#), have shown that the isolation, loneliness and the uncertainty around employment and housing brought on by the pandemic can lead to or worsen depression and anxiety. Existing chronic health conditions can negatively impact mental health and pre-existing substance abuse issues also can be aggravated by COVID-19. Research studies are also identifying psychiatric symptoms that may be caused by the virus. [This study](#) was just published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on an association between acute COVID-19 symptoms and depression.

For those experiencing mental health issues today, finding help can be difficult. “We encourage you to seek help for your immediate mental health needs and those of your loved ones,” said **NC Psychiatric Association President Zachary Feldman, MD**. “You can reach out to your primary doctor or call the Hope4NC line that is available day or night to provide support, information or referrals—1-855-587-3463.”

If you are trying to find the crisis provider for yourself or a loved one or if your patient needs an urgent assessment, the crisis provider for your area can be located at <http://crisissolutionsnc.org/>

A number of organizations have resources for coping during these stressful times, such as [NAMI-NC](#) or the [CDC](#). The American Psychiatric Association’s COVID resource page includes sections for families and for non-psychiatric physicians/health care providers: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/covid-19-coronavirus>.

(more)



History shows that in the aftermath of any disaster, the mental health toll continues long after the disaster has ended. For instance, front line health care workers in particular are still in the heat of battle against the COVID-19 virus, but mental health professionals have indicated once the war against the virus ends some of these health care heroes may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders.

Access to mental health care is more important than ever and we are glad to see legislators taking note. At the NC General Assembly several bills already have been introduced to address getting people the help they need, including [HB149—Improving Access to Care Through Telehealth](#), which improves telehealth coverage for mental health care.

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***About the North Carolina Medical Society:*** *The North Carolina Medical Society is the oldest professional member organization in North Carolina, representing physicians and physician assistants who practice in the state. Founded in 1849, the Society seeks to provide leadership in medicine by uniting, serving and representing physicians and their health care teams to enhance the health of North Carolinians.*

***About the North Carolina Psychiatric Association:*** *The North Carolina Psychiatric Association is the professional medical organization that represents 1000 NC physicians who specialize in psychiatry. Its mission is to promote the highest quality care for North Carolina residents with mental illness, including substance use disorders; advance and represent the profession of psychiatry and medicine in North Carolina; and serve the professional needs of its membership.*