

Sozosei Foundation Hosts Inaugural Summit on Decriminalizing Mental Illness



The Sozosei Foundation convened its Inaugural Summit on Decriminalizing Mental Illness from December 14-16, 2020. The Summit convened over 200 advocates, experts, and people with lived experience to share ideas, discuss best and emerging practices, and eliminate the inappropriate use of the justice system for the diagnosis, treatment, and care of mental illness.

Key Themes from the Summit:

- Data must inform all policy reform and direct service design
- Brain health should be considered as part of overall health and should not be siloed from other preventive or acute healthcare
- Discrimination against people with mental illnesses and the stigmatization of the practice of psychiatry must end
- Systemic racism is pervasive and must be addressed to ensure equitable access to care outside of the criminal justice system
- Those with lived experience must be included in the movement to decriminalize mental illness

Day 1

The Summit began with opening remarks from the Foundation's leadership, including Kabir Nath, President & CEO, Otsuka North America Pharmaceutical Business and Board Member, Sozosei Foundation; Melissa Beck, Esq., Executive Director of the Sozosei Foundation, and William H. Carson, M.D., Chair of the Board of the Sozosei Foundation.

Kabir welcomed attendees on behalf of the Foundation and explained that the intersection of criminal justice and mental health is a natural outgrowth of Otsuka's way of working and thinking. Melissa expanded on Kabir's remarks, sharing that the Summit was designed to move forward the mission of the Foundation as a convener, "Our inaugural summit seeks to demonstrate the incredible value of providing a forum for dedicated experts to come together and share their perspectives and expertise." Before introducing the day's keynote speaker, Dr. Carson called for a radical new way of "re-medicalizing" psychiatry stating that "Discrimination against those with mental illness, coupled with the stigmatization of the practice of psychiatry—which

Attendance Metrics from the Summit:

- More than 200 attendees from the advocacy, philanthropic, healthcare, and academic fields
- Attendance from the US, Canada, Ireland, Ukraine, and Japan
- Average watch time: Over 1 hour and 20 minutes

discourages treatment-seeking efforts—harm people living with mental illness. I'm proud of the role the Sozosei Foundation will play in addressing this important and neglected issue."

Dr. Altha Stewart, M.D., Past President of the American Psychiatric Association, Senior Associate Dean for Community Health Engagement & Associate Professor, UTHSC, Department of Psychiatry provided the day's keynote calling for the disentanglement of the judicial and health systems, sharing that "We will know we have made progress when mental illness is first seen as an illness and not a 'criminal' behavior."

Following Dr. Stewart's keynote, Norman Ornstein, Ph.D., VP of the Matthew Harris Ornstein Memorial Foundation moderated a lively discussion with authors Pete Earley, Christine Montross, M.D., and Alisa Roth. Their discussion framed how mental illness came to be criminalized, overviewed the current state of play in the United States, and reflected on the human cost of criminalization.

Day 2

The second day of the Summit began with opening remarks from Mary Michael, Vice President, Patient Advocacy and Stakeholder Management, Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc. and Board Member, Sozosei Foundation. Mary called for increased collaboration and community from attendees, sharing that, "We want to come together to think about solutions, find new ways to collaborate, and bring fresh energy and thinking to hard, seemingly intractable problems."

Mary introduced the keynote speaker for day 2, Rebecca Messing Haigler, Value, Access and Health Economics Lead, Verily Life Sciences. Rebecca emphasized the need for data in her keynote address. "We must use data to drive decision-making – and fuel new technologies that support treatment, care, and intervention for those with mental illness."

Next, William H. Carson, M.D., moderated a panel where attendees got the chance to hear from leading advocates including Judge Steve Leifman, Associate Administrative Judge, Miami-Dade County Court - Criminal Division; Debbie Plotnick, Vice President, State and Federal Advocacy, Mental Health America; and Sandy Santana, Executive Director, Children's Rights. The panel focused on the bright spots and lessons that can be learned from the ongoing work being done in the legal and policy systems. "By bringing together leaders with different perspectives on how to solve this problem, Sozosei has taken an important step," said Judge Steve Leifman. "Now, we as a community must continue to move forward with the momentum generated and demand meaningful change."

Finally, organizations from across North America shared their work to decriminalize mental illness through a series of PechaKucha presentations. PechaKuchas were presented by Sound Mind, National Council for Behavioral Health, One Mind, Social Finance, John Howard Society, The Bail Project, The Trevor Project, Council of State Governments Justice Center and Mental Health Colorado.

Day 3

On day 3 of the Summit the University of Texas Design Institute for Health hosted a "design thinking" workshop to foster discussion of a future in which mental illness is treated as a disease and not a crime. Melissa Beck introduced the session and explained how it tied into Sozosei's work, sharing that the community must think about more creative solution to decriminalize mental illness. During the workshop attendees had the chance to collaborate in small groups using the Three Horizons Framework and alternative future scenarios to build on what they heard in Days 1 & 2 and identify bold, long-term ideas that should be part of our vision.

The Sozosei Foundations Inaugural Summit concluded with remarks from William H. Carson, M.D., who shared the Sozosei Foundation's future plans, sharing, "I firmly believe that good work is happening across the country and the globe. But we do not have enough opportunities to validate, share it, and scale it. I hope this Summit is a step forward in building more collaboration and finding ways to share ideas across the field."

The full summit sessions are available on the Sozosei Foundation's website, along with attendee contact information and relevant resources that were shared during the summit. Please learn more by visiting www.sozoseifoundation.org.



ABOUT THE SOZOSEI FOUNDATION

The Sozosei Foundation is a U.S.-based, private charitable foundation founded by Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc. As its inaugural program area, Sozosei will address the over-incarceration of people with mental illness. The Foundation will announce other health-related program areas in 2021. Sozosei will also lead corporate social responsibility activities focused on disaster relief and local philanthropy, centered on equity and sustainability. Visit www.SozoseiFoundation.org to learn more about the Sozosei Foundation.

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