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National Center for Mental Health Checkups Comments on NRC/IOM Report on Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders among Young People

NEW YORK - A report on preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders was released today by The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. A chapter of the report addresses screening as a means of prevention of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders in youth. The top-line recommendations are below as well as comments from TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkup leaders in the area of mental health research and policy.

What the Report Says about Youth Mental Health Screening:

- Identification of risk must be tied to effective intervention.
- Primary care settings, schools and communities are important settings for screening.
- Validated screening tools should be used; sensitivity to culture is highlighted.
- Guidelines must be agreed to for referrals; screening must avoid labeling.
- Targeting high risk youth (foster care, juvenile justice, youth with depressed parents) is good public health practice.
- A national research plan on prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in youth should be developed and funded to learn how to implement evidence-based screening and prevention in real world community settings.

Statement from Bradley S. Peterson, M.D., Director of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Columbia University [Dr. Peterson is a member of the Committee that prepared this report.]

"Research shows that the early identification of mental health problems can save lives. TeenScreen and other such detection screens have been shown to be effective in the early identification of youth at risk for problems. The challenge going forward, which I believe can be accomplished through the 10-year research plan that this IOM report recommends, will be to link screening programs with practical, evidence-based interventions and then to evaluate rigorously and scientifically what works to help our nation's youth. This research-based approach is needed to further implement, perpetuate, and disseminate model prevention programs on a national scale."

Statement from Laurie Flynn, executive director, TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University

"Teens in trouble need to be supported by their primary care physicians as well as their schools and communities through routine whole health checkups, assessing both mental and physical health. I'm encouraged that the passage of the Mental Health Parity Act and SCHIP [the State Children's Health Insurance Program] will enable comprehensive, complete checkups to be a routine part of our young people's health care. Reaching our youth early will help them get the care that they need so that lifetime disability from mental illness can be minimized and suicide can be prevented. Our nation's youth deserve to be healthy and productive in mind, body and spirit, but they need our systematic investment and help."

Information about the TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups

The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups' aim is to detect mental illness in youth early by increasing access to mental health checkups as a routine part of health care.

The national center's goal is to reduce and prevent disability associated with mental illness and its most serious consequence – suicide. The center is partnering with primary care providers, mental health organizations, and more than 500 schools and community-based programs in 43 states as well as elected officials in Washington and key state capitols to ensure youth at risk are identified and referred to services. The center currently has collaborations with managed care and primary care providers in five states.