

## Support Mental Health Research — Your Action Today Will Impact Our Future

By Luke Kramer, Executive Director at [The STARR Coalition](#)

The mental health crisis we're experiencing because of the pandemic has been intense, but it isn't new. We've been battling this crisis for almost a decade—COVID only intensified those numbers and has impacted all aspects of mental health—from prevalence, to practice, to research.

This needs to change and it's why The STARR Coalition, a non-profit dedicated to advancing mental health research, has brought together leaders from across the mental health research and advocacy ecosystem around a *National Call to Action to Support Mental Health Research*.

From 2008 to 2019, the percentage of adults in the U.S. [who experienced mental illness](#) increased from 17.7% (39.8 million people) to 20.6% (51.5 million people). Over that same period, the percentage of adults [who experienced a serious mental illness](#) increased from 3.7% (8.3 million people) to 5.2% (13.1 million people). As early as 2013, mental disorders topped the list of most costly health conditions in the U.S., with spending at \$201 billion.

Current data from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) and [U.S. Census Bureau](#) suggest that these numbers have **doubled**, and in some cases **quadrupled**, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Imagine if cancer rates doubled in a year—the outcry would be profound and resounding. But this isn't cancer—it's mental health. And the difference in response is painfully clear.

In March 2020, as the pandemic surged, mental health research came to a halt. In an effort to protect patient safety, trial recruitment was paused, hospitals interrupted access to all but essential services, and academic researchers lost access to resources needed for their research.

This disruption came as investment and innovation in mental health disorders were already staggeringly low.

Despite the prevalence and significant burden of mental illnesses, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) only spent about [7% of its \\$239 billion research budget](#) on mental health research. And of the 273 drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) between 2015-2020, only [nine](#) were psychiatric treatments.

As a result, the imperative of mental health research has intensified. A *National Call to Action to Support Mental Health Research* was established in response.

*Call to Action* has two goals: inform the public about the urgency around development of mental illness treatments and provide actionable ways for individuals and organizations to support mental health research.

There are many ways to increase awareness and support the advancement of mental health research, such as joining and donating to organizations that support research, participating in walks and runs that bring awareness to mental illnesses and research, and signing petitions that advocate for mental health research funding and support. To view the full list and get more information about the *National Call to Action*, please visit <http://thestarr.org/supportmhresearch/>.

Each day we see the impact of COVID-19 on the existing mental health crisis in this country. We've learned so much over the last year—and we cannot allow these lessons to be ignored.

The problem is clear, now we must act. But we need your help. Together, we can take immediate action to make an impact and shape the future of mental health research.

*Luke Kramer, Executive Director of the STARR Coalition, has been committed to advocating for mental health recovery for more than two decades. Over the last several years, he has shifted his focus to cutting-edge research.*