

# National Council for Mental Wellbeing

## Five-year Strategic Plan

FY2025-FY2029



NATIONAL COUNCIL  
for **Mental Wellbeing**

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# Message from Leadership

Despite overwhelming need, nearly 30 million people across the U.S. do not have access to affordable, comprehensive mental health and substance use treatment. The National Council for Mental Wellbeing is fighting every day to remedy that, with an unwavering commitment to ensure everyone in this country can receive the high-quality mental health and substance use treatment they need and deserve.

We work to ensure equitable access to services, build capacity for care delivery, invest in the workforce and promote mental wellbeing as a core component of health and health care. We are guided by our vision that mental wellbeing — including recovery from substance use — is a reality for everyone, everywhere.

## Our call

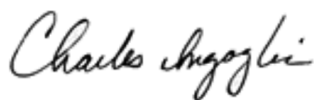
As we continue this critical work, we understand what has gotten us to today may not get us to the future. Now is the time to look for scaled solutions, consider groundbreaking new ideas and build on what has worked well.

We collaborate with members, state associations, advocacy partners, funders and many others to find ways to provide services, resources and support to the millions of people living with mental health and substance use challenges. This is an exciting time to be part of the National Council!

## Our priorities

The National Council is constantly weighing how we can make the biggest and best impact on our industry, members and communities. Our staff and Board of Directors work together so every decision we make brings more people with mental health and substance use challenges into our broad array of member organizations, including those that are Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). We prioritize this legislatively, and we advocate for policies that help more people access the services our members provide.

We prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB). We work collaboratively with our members to identify and address inequities in access to mental health and substance use care while looking within, assessing how we can live DEIB principles in our daily practices. We are committed to designing scaled solutions to the workforce crisis, which is both chronic and urgent. We are spearheading the design and delivery of national workforce development, working with the field’s leading health experts, thought leaders, policy makers and advocates to develop ideas, solutions, resources and tools to grow capacity, attract new talent and recruit new staff to our member organizations. We are exploring new ideas and approaches to bring necessary mental health and substance use services, resources and workers to meet the growing demand. We have been — and will continue to be — driving best practice standards.



**Charles Ingolia**  
President and CEO



**Edward Woods**  
Chair, Board of Directors



**Vitka Eisen**  
Chair, Strategic Planning Committee

# History of the National Council

The [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#) fights for a stronger, better funded and more integrated approach to mental health and substance use care in communities across the country.

In a [1963 message](#) to Congress, President John F. Kennedy called for “a bold, new approach” to solving mental health problems. That call sparked the creation of the National Council six years later. Over the years, the National Council has been a thought leader, working on behalf of and alongside our more than 3,400 member organizations to advance mental health and substance use care through advocacy, partnership and action. We drive health care improvement at the local and federal levels, strengthen the substance use and mental health safety net, increase mental health literacy and more.

Kennedy embraced the idea of a national mental health program, recognizing mental health as one of the nation’s most critical health problems. In his address, he described a vision for “a new type of health facility, one which will return mental health care to the mainstream of American medicine and at the same time upgrade mental health services.” He wanted to improve the quality of care at existing state institutions and reduce the number of patients in institutional care by 50% or more. Ultimately, this led to the Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963.

There have been many significant changes and challenges in our field over the years, and the National Council has responded accordingly. In 2014, the National Council and the State Associations of Addiction Services merged, allowing the National Council to embrace substance use matters more deeply — a journey that continues today.

Our 2021 rebranding efforts shined a light on “mental wellbeing,” or thriving regardless of a mental health or substance use challenge. Mental wellbeing represents resilience, strength and recovery, and promotes the importance of preventive care and the need to increase access to life-saving services. With that, we embrace our vision to make mental wellbeing — including recovery from substance use challenges — a reality for everyone.





# Mission and Vision

We are the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, a 501(c)(3) association and the unifying voice of organizations that deliver mental health and substance use recovery services in America.



## Our Vision

Despite overwhelming need, nearly 30 million people across the U.S. do not have access to affordable, comprehensive mental health and substance use treatment. That’s where we come in.

We have been serving on the frontlines of mental health and substance use care since 1969, fighting to ensure everyone in America receives the high-quality treatment they deserve. That means ensuring equitable access to services, building capacity for care delivery, investing in the workforce and promoting mental wellbeing as a core component of health and health care.

We are guided by our vision that mental wellbeing — including recovery from substance use — is a reality for everyone, everywhere. It’s who we are. It’s what we do.



## Core Values

At the National Council, we live our values. They are the shared foundation of our culture and they drive our every action.



### Have a Bias to Action

*We discuss, plan and DO!*



### Be a Team Player

*We know we’re greater together than we are alone.*



### Champion Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

*All voices are heard.  
All beliefs are honored.  
We lead with empathy.*



### Shape the Future

*What we do as individuals positively affects our future.*



### Be Curious

*We seek out new ideas and challenges.*

# Introduction to the Strategic Plan

Clearly, the landscape has changed since the Board's previous strategic plan review in February 2020. As shown in studies from an assortment of groups, including [The World Health Organization](#), [National Institutes of Health](#), [Mayo Clinic](#) and [Pew Research Center](#), the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the mental health and substance use crisis significantly.

A 2022 [KFF/CNN survey](#) found that 90% of the public thinks there is a mental health crisis in the U.S. post-pandemic, with nearly half of parents (47%) reporting that the pandemic had a negative impact on their children's mental health. And the National Council's 2022 Access to Care Survey, a national survey with The Harris Poll, found that a staggering [43% of U.S. adults](#) who say they needed substance use treatment or mental health care in the previous 12 months did not receive that care, and numerous [barriers to access](#) stood between them and needed treatment.

With developments like these, the National Council Board of Directors saw the need to update our strategic plan, incorporating our values and commitment to members and aligning with business management expert Patrick Lencioni's [Model for Organizational Health](#).

To support this work, we formed a committee of Board of Directors members and staff to help design and guide our yearlong process. Through intentional reflection and careful deliberation, the Strategic Planning Committee reached consensus on five goals, each with supporting strategies and metrics, that will propel the National Council into the future.





# Goals and Strategies

We have given substantial thought to our strategic goals — and why these five are right for our Strategic Plan. Each is relevant to mapping our path, charting where we are going and determining how we will get there. These goals outline how we will do things better, faster and louder — and they will keep us focused on what is essential.



## Goal 1: Advocate for the most effective *public policy* in our field.



**Strategy 1** — Support legislation and administrative efforts to expand, protect, retain and diversify the workforce and advance the workforce pipeline.



**Strategy 2** — Increase equitable access to high-quality services via Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics and other policies.



**In five years, our efforts to secure long-range bipartisan support and drive successful conversations with Congress and the administration will result in legislation and regulations that will have a tremendously positive impact on our members and the communities they support.**

Public policy is what members want — and need — most from the National Council. Our members look for us to have that national policy voice in Congress and with the administration. The National Council’s public policy efforts support our members’ efforts to make mental wellbeing a reality in their communities.

We work tirelessly to be the leading voice in our industry. As a result, our members and our state associations often tap into our national policy influence to help support their local- and state-level needs. And we cannot do the policy work without our members’ engagement and commitment. Our comprehensive public policy efforts reflect and respond to the broad range of needs represented within our membership along the continuum of mental health and substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, support and recovery.

We champion bills that increase funding for greater health equity and expand mental health and substance use treatment programs and policies, including CCBHCs. We advocate for higher pay rates, more jobs and workers and greater diversity in the workforce. Our policy agenda touches Medicare, Medicaid and discretionary programs across the federal government.





## Goal 2: Strengthen, diversify and grow our membership.



**Strategy 1** — Enhance engagement with 100% state associations — mental health and substance use care and treatment organizations that are part of an association or state government entity that is a member of the National Council.



**Strategy 2** — Increase stand-alone membership in non-100% states and partner with 100% state associations on membership growth.



**In five years, other membership and trade organizations will look to the National Council as a model for best practices in engaging members.**

The more members we have, the stronger we — and our advocacy efforts — are. To be the nation’s leading voice in the mental health and substance use care industry, we need the power of many voices behind us.

The National Council’s membership model is primarily based on what we call “100% state associations”: mental health and substance use care and treatment organizations that are part of associations or state government entities that are National Council members. We also welcome “stand-alone” members and do so in coordination with our state associations if one exists in the same state.

We are working to accelerate diversity, increase access and strengthen representation and voice. We will build and diversify our membership to become more impactful. Together, our voices are louder and more powerful.



## Goal 3: Meaningfully impact our members' workforce and leadership development challenges.

**Strategy 1** — Explore and implement partnerships and programs to facilitate the creation of scalable workforce pipeline offerings for our members.

**Strategy 2** — Mitigate racial, ethnic, linguistic and socioeconomic disparities in licensure pass rates.



**In five years' time, we will reduce the percentage of the nation that reports a mental health and substance use workforce shortage, specifically in geographic areas that overlap with our 100% association members.**

Workforce and leadership challenges are among the steepest hills National Council members are climbing. There is an ongoing labor shortage across all industries, and it is especially extreme in our sector. Without enough qualified workers to meet the need, we are capacity constrained. Our sector has a vast gap and we are working diligently to fill the need for workers.

Mental health and substance use care is not always an obvious career path, and it needs more visibility and accessibility to attract more diverse workers. Research published by [JAMA Network Open](#) shows that health outcomes are better when providers have similar identities to the communities they serve.

The larger workforce crisis is exacerbated by numerous barriers to entry as well as racial, ethnic, linguistic and socioeconomic disparities. If we want to expand the mental health and substance use treatment workforce, we must continue to focus on breaking down these barriers.

The National Council can leverage member insights by compiling and monitoring national data. We can ask questions about employee lifecycle challenges — such as onboarding, retention and succession — and develop valuable solutions for our members. This can help us drive more informed decision-making — and positive changes — moving forward.



## Goal 4: Increase the reach and impact of our **education, training and services.**



**Strategy 1** — Improve ease of use and accessibility of products and services.



**Strategy 2** — Expand content offerings to increase workforce capacity and address members' training and education needs.



*By expanding capacity, we will make our education and training more approachable and accessible for a wider range of people **in five years.***

The National Council's members know our education and training services, which are an important aspect of improving the quality of care available around the country. The more we educate people and improve practice, the more lives we can save. Our training and education efforts strengthen our credibility and implement the policy changes that make the field — and our communities — stronger.

The education and training that we deliver must continue to be the best in the industry. It is essential to expand the reach and impact of our educational curriculum — and improve our delivery methods — to broaden our DEIB efforts and address different learning styles and needs. Our efforts should consider and adapt to accommodate a wider range of learning abilities and learning needs, ease of use, accessibility, and linguistic, cultural and disability inclusivity, as well as the use of people-centered, inclusive language.





## Goal 5: Expand the National Council **brand**, stressing mental wellbeing, mental health and substance use awareness.



**Strategy 1** — Affirm a definition of “mental wellbeing” for the field and for the National Council.



**Strategy 2** — Increase National Council visibility for members at a regional level.



**In five years**, if you mention the National Council to any member, they will 1) know who we are, 2) associate us with the positive work we have done for them and the field, and 3) be proud to be associated with us!

The National Council is well-known in the field, but our organization can become better recognized and understood by our member organizations, their staff and others. We will continue raising awareness of the National Council and its impact among our field and the public.

As part of these efforts, we will spotlight the National Council as an industry thought leader, championing mental health and substance use treatment, improving access and care, and advancing health equity.



# How We Will Get There

The National Council leadership likes to say, “What got us here won’t get us there.” To accomplish the goals we set, we must continue to look within and make improvements that keep the organization healthy in the long term. We are working to improve our infrastructure, processes and people management. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we initiated an organizational redesign to encourage collaboration across similar functions in service of our mission and vision, resulting in five new departmental groupings or Offices: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging; Strategy and Growth; Program; Operations and Transformation; and People and Culture. In the coming years, we intend to embed each element of the Strategic Plan into the appropriate Offices to inspire staff and guide prioritization of work.

Additionally, we leverage principles Patrick Lencioni sets forth in “[The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#),” which explores work team dynamics as a strategy for improving organizational health. To get from where we are now to where we want to be, the National Council will emphasize three areas of growth:

## ***1. Build our talent management capabilities to strengthen how we attract, develop and retain a diverse, high-performing, inclusive workforce.***

The National Council staff has grown significantly in recent years, and we expect to grow more in the future, so we are working diligently to build the proper infrastructure to handle that growth. Our talent management strategy will deliver long-term value and impact by attracting and retaining top talent, defining and supporting career growth, aligning awards and recognition for staff and leadership achievements, creating a culture of continuous learning, and incorporating DEIB into all aspects of our people-related practices. We are responding to feedback calling for strong internal leadership and are acting on it with many well-earned internal promotions and a new targeted leadership development program. To improve our organizational cohesion, we are working toward more streamlined onboarding, integrated departmental operations and enhanced collaboration across the board. By regularly seeking and acting on staff input, we demonstrate our commitment to evolving our processes and ensuring the National Council remains a supportive, inclusive workplace.



## ***2. Develop, improve and streamline internal processes, infrastructure models and systems.***

When the pandemic dictated that we go remote in 2020, the National Council had to rethink how we interact internally and engage with our members and community externally. We updated our infrastructure for better communication, collaboration and data management, while also enhancing cybersecurity. In the coming years, we will continue to expand and enhance the National Council's technological infrastructure to be even more collaborative, agile, transparent and inclusive. We have initiated a systems enhancement program, paving the way for more efficient data consolidation and analytics, and we are exploring progressive solutions, including artificial intelligence, to replace outdated processes. Considering these important infrastructure improvements, we are elevating our approach to change management — and more clearly defining roles, responsibilities and governance — to ensure our staff can fully leverage the new systems.

## ***3. Make DEIB an integral component of our workplace culture and core values.***

Creating an environment of belonging and inclusion is the right thing to do. It also strengthens us internally, helping with engagement, retention and collaboration, and externally to maximize our impact with our members and the diverse populations we serve. This is not a one-time effort but a long-term commitment. We will continue to value and prioritize DEIB at every level, ensuring everyone is treated fairly and all staff are valued and respected for their diverse backgrounds, experiences, identities and perspectives. We have made progress around DEIB over the past few years, but we recognize that we have critical work to do in this ongoing journey.





# Monitoring Our Progress

For this Strategic Plan to work we must not only implement it, but we must also live it. Our Board of Directors and staff have the tremendous responsibility and opportunity to achieve these five strategic goals and Audacious Aims (see Appendix). We must continue important conversations and integrate the particulars of the Strategic Plan into our work. Over the next five years, we will measure our progress, understand where opportunities lie, know when we need to push more and collaborate with partners to actualize our goals.

Measuring our progress is a hefty — and critical — endeavor. The National Council and our members exist in an environment where more data is needed. In developing our Strategic Plan, we have purposefully established associated metrics as a bold statement about our willingness and commitment to data collection, baselining and reporting on our progress as we work toward these goals. Measuring and data collection will begin in the first year.

Further, our commitments include:

- Align meeting agendas to the Strategic Plan and signal how agenda topics are aligned to goals, strategies and Audacious Aims (see Appendix).
- Use the Strategic Plan as a guiding structure for monthly reports to the Board.
- Ensure that Office, Department and individual goals cascade from the strategies outlined in the Strategic Plan. This will become progressively easier each year, allowing staff to see how their individual performance and developmental goals contribute to the bigger picture. The organization, Offices and Departments will report on their progress toward annual goals.
- Validate that our organizational Strategic Anchors align with the Strategic Plan. According to Patrick Lencioni, Strategic Anchors can make a Strategic Plan more easily actionable by, among other things, becoming the filter through which organizational decisions are made. We apply the Strategic Anchors when deciding to start, stop or continue the organization's various activities.
- Create and fill a project manager position to create the reporting systems, partner with leaders on ongoing progress and report to the staff and board.

This is just the beginning. As we begin to implement our Strategic Plan, we will discover new ways to bring it to life within the National Council. We enthusiastically lean into this.

# Appendix: Audacious Aims

During the strategic planning process, we discovered interest in certain initiatives that were intriguing but simply not feasible in a five-year timeline. When these ideas were discussed in various forums, people got excited — inspired even. So, we are including them in the Strategic Plan, outside of Goals 1-5, as Audacious Aims.

To move forward with these aims we need to conduct research to understand the problems to be solved, what has been tried so far, and whether our ideas are feasible. The strategies that we ultimately implement may look different than what's listed here. But we want to honor our bias toward action by drawing attention to these important matters, having bigger conversations about them, and seeing where that takes us.

Our work for each of these Audacious Aims will be multi-year, huge-lift, big-impact efforts. Naming the ideas allows us to prioritize our attention and devote resources to them, while giving us the flexibility to evolve our thinking over a lengthier period than the five-year timeline indicated for Goals 1-5.

1. Increase workforce size and diversity by creating a nationally recognized pipeline initiative for the mental health and substance use care workforce.
2. Ensure the sustainability and vitality of our members by securing federal resources for state mental health and substance use provider associations.
3. Improve our ability to take informed, strategic actions by creating a comprehensive, reliable dataset of member services and outcomes.
4. Enhance community capacity to support people with mental health and substance use conditions including those in crisis, by ensuring everyone, everywhere can recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental health or substance use challenge via Mental Health First Aid training and have access to timely care provided by CCBHCs.
5. Promote evidence-based approaches to mental health and substance use treatment by ensuring our members are equipped with the information, tools and resources they need.
6. Increase accessibility and consumer choice for mental health and substance use treatments by advancing integration of new technologies and adoption of meaningful payment models.
7. Mitigate racial and cultural biases embedded in mental health and substance use research and practice by advocating for research approaches that are inclusive of the experiences and needs of people of diverse backgrounds and conducted in a way that mitigates bias.

**We want to give special thanks and acknowledgment to the Strategic Planning Committee members and our consultants, all of whom have been instrumental in the planning effort.**

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# How to Engage With Us

Learn more about the National Council for Mental Wellbeing — and the benefits of becoming a valued member — by visiting [TheNationalCouncil.org](https://TheNationalCouncil.org) or contacting [Membership@TheNationalCouncil.org](mailto:Membership@TheNationalCouncil.org).

Want to stay informed of our events, programs and thought leadership? Follow us on social media!



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