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Sheppard Pratt takes a bold step forward in its efforts to transform how, when, and where children receive access to care for mental health.

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Sheppard Pratt takes a bold step forward in its efforts to transform how, when, and where children receive access to care for mental health.

YOUTH movement

by BILL DONAHUE

GROWING UP IS NEVER EASY.

Recent years have been especially difficult for young people, however, given the isolation and fear caused by the pandemic, the antagonism pervading our politics and our culture, and the looming threat of global conflict, as well as nonstop exposure to social media. Add on the normal pressures that children experience while trying to find their way in the world and the burden must feel unbearable at times.

Sheppard Pratt aims to “change the narrative.” As a leading provider of mental health services that has been improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities since the 1800s, Maryland-based Sheppard Pratt has undertaken a bold and comprehensive fundraising campaign with an ambitious goal: to develop and expand unique mental health programs for children and adolescents at every stage in their journey—locally, nationally, and across the globe. The campaign, known as “Now More than Ever,” was launched in January 2019, with the goal of raising \$50 million. Having eclipsed that goal far sooner than expected, Sheppard Pratt has trained its sights on \$100 million.

Sheppard Pratt President and CEO Harsh K. Trivedi, M.D., M.B.A., believes the campaign can help to “radically change” the

state of youth mental health. We spoke with Dr. Trivedi about the scope of the mental health crisis among America’s youth, how the campaign will reshape the way children receive care in schools, hospitals, and communities, and how people who share Sheppard Pratt’s desire to help can play a part in “changing the face of youth mental health.”

Q&A

The increased focus on mental health may be one of the few positives to come out of the pandemic. Was the pandemic an impetus for the “Now More Than Ever” campaign?

There was a crisis looming in mental health even prior to COVID-19. While the whole nation has struggled and everyone sees the need for more mental health services, we can already tell that children have been particularly affected by the events of the past few years. With this campaign, we made a very specific decision to address this crisis with a comprehensive look at the entire system of care.

Why are children so susceptible right now?
What has changed is the proliferation of

technology and social media. Kids have access to a lot more information now. In many ways, they are smarter, faster, and better, but they are also exposed to things no prior generation had been exposed to—intense scrutiny by peer groups, the nonstop intrusion of social media, the influence of platforms like TikTok, and the changing definition of what it means to do well or be popular. Now, add in the social isolation that has come from the pandemic. Adolescence is supposed to be a time to figure out who you are, but what’s happening in the world now is very confusing. The level of division and conflict has risen, not just in regard to national and global events, but also in the lives our kids are leading. The magic of adolescence is to experiment with new things, to figure out who you are, and to do it safely such that you can learn through your mistakes. Adolescence no longer provides the safety net that it once did.

Having achieved its goal for the first phase of the campaign, Sheppard Pratt has expanded the fundraising goal to \$100 million. What will that level of support enable Sheppard Pratt to accomplish?

When organizations try to “fix” mental health, it’s usually a hyper-focused solution,

where they will create a single new clinic or program to address a specific need. Unfortunately, that approach does not have the impact that's needed to help kids and families who are struggling to access quality care. We have to address the barriers to care and reimagine how kids and families access mental health services—a reworking of the entire paradigm. As we move toward our new goal, we want to radically change mental health not only within our own services, but also in the state, throughout the region, and across the nation. We want to take our best practices and expand them to regional centers across the country, even around the world, making resources accessible not only to parents, but also to teachers

and other community leaders. It takes a village to raise a child well. Sheppard Pratt is going to build that village,

It takes a village to raise a child well. Sheppard Pratt is going to build that village, one where every child can flourish and thrive."

— Dr. Harsh K. Trivedi,
Sheppard Pratt President and CEO



Sheppard Pratt, which is headquartered in Maryland, has been improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities since the 1800s.

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How can people get involved and do their part?

There are a number of ways people can make an impact. We as adults have to talk openly and often about the real challenges that get in the way of accessing youth mental health services. It's about changing the narrative. If a child were to get cancer, there would be fundraisers and the love of a community to help that child. There should be the same response for a child who is dealing with severe depression. What does that support and kindness look like? How do we build that support across a community? How do we foster healthier lifestyles and encourage mental wellness? We're looking to partner with donors who say, "Yes, I want to change the face of youth mental health." Even the smallest of gifts allows us to work with the most vulnerable. We also need businesses, corporations, and philanthropists to come forward with their passion for fixing a problem. Those transformational donors can help us change the narrative.

We are at a critical moment where we as a society need to pool our efforts to safeguard the mental health of our youth. We thought it would take five to seven years to raise \$50 million, but we got there in three years. Clearly there's a need and a desire. Sheppard Pratt is a national leader in terms of the breadth and scope of the services we provide. As a national leader, we are making the commitments of time, energy, and resources needed to get to the next level, and we believe there is no limit to the things we can accomplish to change the trajectory of a child's life. Now is the time, and there's so much more we are ready to do.

Mental Health STARTS AT HOME

Sheppard Pratt's "Now More Than Ever" campaign builds on the idea that collaboration can spur life-changing improvements in children's mental wellness. At the same time, Dr. Trivedi reminds parents that the road to mental health begins at home. He proposes three ways they can help:

- **Talk openly and often.** Be proactive and reach out with kindness and support, and offer to listen without judgment. Be open about your own struggles, too. Removing the lingering stigma of mental illness can help us talk about our struggles and get the help we need.
- **Encourage habits that foster mental wellness.** Teach kids to eat a nutritious diet in moderate amounts, exercise, get outside, spend time with people you love, and engage in productive work.
- **Limit screen time.** Social media may expose children to bullying, contribute to obesity and eating disorders, and lead to depression, anxiety, and self-harm, according to a recent advisory from U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A. Adults should carefully monitor and set limits for kids' screen time, as well as encourage kids to socialize in real life.

"You, as an adult, are the best advocate for your child," Dr. Trivedi adds. "We need to let them know it's OK to not be OK. We also need to be understanding and willing to get them the help they need when they need it." ■



For more information on

SHEPPARD PRATT'S "NOW MORE THAN EVER" CAMPAIGN,

or to make a donation, visit www.sheppardpratt.org/whats-next.