

## **A Spotlight on Partnership to End Addiction**

In anticipation of the presentation at the upcoming Kirby Alliance meeting by Dr. Fred Muench, President of Partnership to End Addiction, and Dr. Wilson Compton, Deputy Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and F. M. Kirby Foundation board member, we felt it appropriate to provide a spotlight on the Partnership to End Addiction, its programming, and how the pandemic may influence the challenges of addiction moving forward.

The Partnership is the result of a January 2019 merger between two preeminent addiction-focused organizations, Center on Addiction and Partnership for Drug-Free Kids. Center on Addiction was founded at Columbia University in 1992 by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Carter administration and Chief Domestic Advisor to President Johnson. In the decades that followed its founding, the organization would distinguish itself as the preeminent leader in conducting and synthesizing research focused on improving the understanding, prevention, and treatment of substance use and addiction. The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids (PDFK) was initially established in 1986, when the nation was in the throes of the crack/cocaine epidemic, by a small group of advertising professionals who felt that if advertising could be used to sell products, perhaps it could be used to “unsell” them as well. Under the leadership of former Johnson & Johnson CEO James E. Burke, PDFK brought together the donated time and talent of advertising agencies, production companies, the SAG-AFTRA union and major television networks, radio stations, magazines, and newspapers in the development and airing of public service advertising (PSAs). With iconic PSAs, such as “Fried Egg” (you may remember the iconic line, “This is your brain on drugs.”), the collective body of work is now the largest single-issue public service campaign in the history of advertising. In later years, PDFK expanded into robust online and in-person support for parents and teens, as well as advertising campaigns through social media and other online platforms in addition to television.

Following the recent merger, these organizations rebranded as the Partnership to End Addiction and established three pillars that spoke to the two organizations’ respective areas of expertise: advancing effective care, changing public policy, and changing culture. The Partnership’s programs are informed by the belief that strong families and support systems are the key to preventing and treating addiction. For example, in advancing effective care, the Partnership has pioneered a digital helpline platform and parent coaching model that offers families a customized place to turn when they need guidance and education about substance use. In 2019, this platform provided resources to more than 5 million individuals and provided direct one-on-one support to over 10,000 caregivers. On a systemic scale, the Partnership provides programmatic and financial analysis to state agencies, policymakers, providers, and clinical experts, particularly useful as the addiction treatment system as a whole transitions to managed care, value-based payment contracting, and a vastly altered treatment landscape. Their advocacy approach is robust and leverages emotional narrative-building by connecting its network of parent advocates, all of whom have lost children and loved ones due to a healthcare system that has failed them, with policymakers at local, state, and federal levels. In recent

years, this has led to three state governments updating their policies to include Partnership research findings and to a federal task force citing their research in their health policy recommendations. Moreover, they continue to broadcast public service announcements in order to dispel stigma surrounding addiction, the most recent of which was launched in October 2020 and features a 3D-animated series of advertisements featuring music by Grammy-nominated band The Lumineers ([View the clip HERE](#)) as well as a podcast hosted by Emmy Award-winning journalist and bestselling author Elizabeth Vargas.

That said, the impact of COVID-19 has drastically changed the landscape in which the Partnership works. Just this week, the CDC released a new report that found more than 87,000 Americans died of overdoses in the 12-month period that ended in September — a 29% increase from the previous year. Further, the number of overdoses was higher than any year since the opioid epidemic began in the 1990s, with the largest increase taking place in April and May when people were experiencing fear and stress from the pandemic, the strictest lockdown measures were in effect, and job losses were on the rise. Since March 2020, families reaching out to the Partnership through the helpline have been reporting that their children's addiction has been amplified by the pandemic. In turn, they rapidly launched COVID-specific programming, which, as of November 2020, was serving over 1,000 clients through COVID-themed automated text messages. They created a COVID-specific resource guide that helpline specialists can use when serving families and increased the number of meetings in their specialist-staffed online support community to track trends and better project future staffing needs. While COVID-19 has presented serious repercussions for sobriety and recovery, the Partnership has proven that it has the adaptability and expertise to continue to lead and foster best practices in the dramatically changing landscape of addiction.

April 19, 2021  
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