Letter to the *Wall Street Journal* Signed by 23 Leading Prevention Scientists

*Dear Editor:*

Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Are Preventable.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial of April 1, 2014 (*The Definition of Insanity*) stated, “...there is no known way to prevent severe mental illness.” This statement is scientifically and verifiably false, easily established by the scores of gold-standard, randomized control studies indexed in the US National Library of Medicine (*www.pubmed.gov*). These are studies funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, private foundations, or comparable entities in OECD countries. Many of these prevention studies include long-term, randomized control follow-up from five to twenty years later, much longer than any preserved randomized psychotropic medication study published at pubmed.gov.

Further, the highest independent entities for such issues in the United States - the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (both chartered by Congress in 1863) - issued a significant and influential report in 2009, *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People.*[^1] Page 1 of that report, which is based on an extensive review of the scientific literature, concludes unequivocally that several evidence-based practices are available now to prevent or delay mental illnesses among children and adolescents. The report then reviews the relevant literature for each developmental phase and setting (e.g., family, school, community) of the nation’s young people.

The signatories of this letter are among the scientists whose work has shown in gold-standard, randomized longitudinal control studies to prevent, avert, or reduce one or more than one mental illness, including members of the IOM Committee issuing the finding that mental illnesses are preventable. We note that one of the witnesses at Congressman Murphy’s hearings was Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, who is the Executive Director of the Stanley Medical Research Institute that funded the first randomized, longitudinal trial to prevent first episode psychosis[^2]—the proximal condition that triggered the events in Tucson, Virginia Tech, and Aurora. That study was published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, an official publication of the American Medical Association. There are replications already happening. Other gold-standard studies protect against or prevent the much earlier predictors of serious mental illness and, then in turn, can prevent serious conditions in later life.

The editorial misses the verifiable fact that scores of strategies on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (operated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) are proven to prevent, reduce, treat, and even help people recover from serious mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. Many of the same practices can be found on the list of the non-partisan, independent Coalition for Evidence Based Policy. Sadly, members of Congress, Governors, state legislators, mayors and families across America have scant awareness any of these rigorously proven preventive strategies,
which are well documented to collectively save local, state, and the federal governments billions by the independent analyses from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Other countries have lower prevalence rates of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, perhaps because they are using the prevention science that United States citizens developed, U.S. taxpayers and foundations funded. A front-page article in the WSJ on December 28, 2010(3) pointed out that 40 million out of 75 million young people in the US had at least one prescription for a psychotropic medication, suggesting we cannot treat our way out of the epidemic. We cordially invite the Wall Street Journal to have its excellent reporters create a series of articles based on the world-class, gold-standard science that can prevent, reduce, or avert mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders that are now epidemic in the United States.

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References Cited