



## VP Biden: Country on cusp of mental health changes

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Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) - Vice President Joe Biden said Wednesday that the country is on the cusp of what he called "remarkable changes" in the treatment of mental illness.

Speaking at a forum on mental health to mark the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's signing of the Community Mental Health Act, Biden said the human brain is the new frontier for exploration in 2013.

He said science is on the verge of "astounding discoveries" that could change how society cares for those with mental illness.

"It's truly amazing what we don't know and it's truly amazing what we might learn," Biden said during a kickoff of the two-day forum at the Kennedy presidential library. "Imagine when we are able to identify the biomarkers for mental illness."

Biden said that ongoing research also holds promise for returning veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress. And as a result of President Barack Obama's health care law, he said, more people have access to care for mental illness because the law bars insurance companies from denying coverage due to preexisting conditions like bipolar disorder.

Still, too many people suffering from mental illness fail to seek help even when there is treatment available, he said.

Biden was joined at the forum by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island.

Sebelius said work remains to be done to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness and its barrier to treatment. She said 60 percent of Americans with mental health challenges and nine out of 10 Americans battling substance abuse aren't receiving care.

"Imagine what it would mean if people felt as comfortable saying they were going for counseling as they were going for a flu shot," she said.

Sebelius also touted the benefits of the health care law, but didn't directly address the problems plaguing the rollout of the health care website - intended to make it easier for the uninsured to sign up for health care plans.

Patrick, the late president's nephew and a longtime mental health advocate, said he also hopes the forum will help remove lingering prejudices surrounding mental illness.

"This is the civil rights movement of our time," Kennedy said. "Together we're going to ensure not only quality treatment but equality of treatment."

Brandon Marshall, who's been treated for a personality disorder, also spoke at the event. Chelsea Clinton, vice chair of the Clinton Foundation, will moderate a conference panel Thursday on public health and community approaches to addressing behavioral health disorders.

The law signed by Kennedy in 1963 aimed to build mental health centers accessible to all Americans so that those with mental illness could be treated while working and living at home, rather than being kept in state institutions that sometimes were neglectful or abusive.

Recent deadly mass shootings, including at the Washington Navy Yard and a Colorado movie theater, have been perpetrated by men who were apparently not being adequately treated for serious mental illnesses.

Those tragedies have renewed public attention to the mental health system and areas where Kennedy's hopes for the treatment and care of those with mental illness were never realized.

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