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## Poll offers election insight

Every four years, New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation presidential primary provides a forum for discussions about public policy, not just for the sake of Granite State voters, but for the nation as a whole. At town halls and in living rooms across the state, candidates are asked their positions on everything from renewable energy and foreign relations, to gun control and student loan debt. The real value of the primary is not just the opportunity for voters in New Hampshire to meet candidates and take selfies, but the chance to put on the national stage the questions and concerns that real people see as critical to their lives.



**ROLAND LAMY**

Syndicated  
Columnist

While health care is understandably in the forefront of most voters' minds on a regular basis, mental health and addiction is clearly on the minds of New Hampshire voters this year. Our state has experienced an opioid crisis for the past eight-plus years; there are continuing hospital emergency room backups, as adults and children in a psychiatric crisis wait for a bed; and between 2012 and 2019 New Hampshire's suicide rate increased at twice the national average. The governor, legislators and community leaders are committed to finding solutions to these issues and have advanced some laudable programs, but progress is often hard to see; and more resources are needed.

With the help of polling from the National Council for Behavioral Health, we now know that increasing funding for mental health and addiction is indeed important to a large percentage of Granite State voters.

"The message is clear: candidates who want to win New Hampshire need to tell voters they have a plan to address the mental health and addiction crisis, one of the most important health issues facing the nation," said Chuck Ingoglia, president and CEO of the National Council, when the poll results were released in December.

The polling found that a large, bipartisan majority of New Hampshire voters see presidential candidates' plans for increasing funding for mental health and addiction as important in deciding their 2020 vote. More than 60% of all New Hampshire voters say they are more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who promises to do more to address mental health; and a bipartisan majority of New Hampshire voters agree that the federal government is not doing enough.

But the poll also found that, even after many months of a primary campaign season, more than half of New Hampshire voters are unaware of any candidate's plan for mental health and addiction. This leaves a gap we need to fill.

The New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association therefore plans to directly engage with candidates during the final 10 days leading up to the Feb. 11 primary election, with 10 questions, including: What steps will you take to prevent suicide? How will you turn the tide on the addiction crisis? What is your plan to advance crisis intervention in the community and alternatives to incarceration? How will you ensure mental health parity? And how will you make sure that underserved groups – people of color, immigrants, veterans and those who identify as LGBTQ+ – have access to mental health and addiction services?

Finally, the National Council poll found something else we all know: that most New Hampshire citizens have experienced mental health conditions and/or addiction personally or in their own families. The stigma of talking about these problems is finally beginning to erode, as more people feel comfortable talking about and seeking help for an illness that is an illness, not something to hide or feel shame about. We hope that continuing the discussion, now and through the November election, helps make that a reality.

Morning Consult conducted the polling between Nov. 13-21, 2019, among a sample of 300 New Hampshire registered voters. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of  $\pm 6\%$ .

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*Roland Lamy is executive director of the New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association.*