

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Suicide Prevention and Treatment: Helping Loved Ones in Mental Health
Crisis”
September 18, 2014**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today, we are here to examine the domestic, and indeed global, public health crisis that is suicide. Suicide claims nearly 40,000 Americans and over 800,000 lives worldwide in any given year. This hearing is a natural outgrowth of this subcommittee’s groundbreaking investigation of federal programs addressing serious mental illness following the December 2012 tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut.

No discussion of the full burden on our society of serious mental illness is complete without a discussion of suicide. For over 90% of suicides, the victim had been diagnosed with a mental illness. And tragically, our nation’s veterans are one of the populations hardest hit by this crisis. While one in ten Americans has served our country, sadly over the last two years, one in every five suicides has involved a vet.

Like other areas covered by our committee’s work on 21st Century Cures, success will depend on our ability to close the gaps between advances in scientific knowledge about treating serious mental illness – which have been extensive – and how the federal government prioritizes and delivers these treatments to the most vulnerable populations. Our delivery of mental health services must keep up with the impressive pace of research and innovation in the field.

There is significant public misunderstanding and misperception regarding suicide. We hope that our ongoing work will educate the public about the many treatments available to address serious mental illness and help correct misconceptions that stand in the way of access to life-saving mental health care for many of the most vulnerable of our friends, family, and neighbors. The federal government has spent billions of dollars on the worthy effort of minimizing the impacts of mental illness over the years; we need to ensure these investments can make a difference.

I’d like to welcome Acting Surgeon General Boris Lushniak, as well as the mental health professionals appearing before us today, Drs. Brent Moutier, and Dvoskin. I also want to especially thank our former colleague, Mr. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, for sharing his deeply personal story. This is an issue that hits very close to home for many of us, and we are hopeful today’s hearing aids the national dialogue.

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