



## **Provident Behavioral Health's Reaction to Mass Shootings**

On Monday morning, our Provident team gathered to discuss yet another round of mass shootings. While these tragedies are unfortunately commonplace in our country – 255 so far this year, averaging more than 1 per day – this week seems especially difficult. So many lives lost in such quick succession, so much fear surrounding motives, so much uneasiness about personal safety, so much shame for what this says about us as a nation.

The Provident experts seated around our table had unique perspectives that shared a common thread:

**Mental health care is a vital part of solving our nation's gun violence problem, but mental illness is not the leading cause.**

What we know is less than 5% of crimes in the US involve people with mental illness. We know people with serious mental health challenges are 12 times more likely to be victims of gun violence rather than perpetrators. We know that stigmatization of mental health challenges discourages those who need it most from getting help. We know rhetoric that creates an "us versus them" mentality against people who struggle with mental health challenges is both ignorant and dangerous.

If you're curious about what we see as first responders in mental healthcare, we can tell you what a tough week this will be for our clients. Call volume on the crisis phone lines we answer has risen almost 20% over the past four days, filled with people from all over Missouri and the U.S. who are desperate for help. Our counseling clients are reaching out to their therapists as they wonder what to tell their children, struggle to make sense of senseless acts, and need extra care and support. Don't we all?

The need for mental health care is immense and is constantly growing. We applaud organizations like the Children's Service Fund in St. Louis County, which is funding mental health screenings in schools so preventative care can be offered when it's most effective, the St. Louis Mental Health Board that supports coordinated care for the people of St. Louis, and The Jefferson Foundation, which recently made a significant investment in increasing mental health services in their community.

Provident Behavioral Health is doing our part every day to address the issue of gun violence in the United States. Our hope is that voters, leaders, and legislators will do theirs.