



## For Immediate Release

### **National Organization of People with Psychiatric Diagnoses Mourns Isla Vista Tragedy**

*A comprehensive public health approach to violence reduction is needed*

WASHINGTON (5/27/14) – The National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery ([NCMHR](#)) grieves for the tragedy that occurred in Isla Vista, California, on May 23. Our hearts go out to the victims' families, and all who have been impacted in the community and across the country.

All Americans are traumatized by the string of mass shootings that have gripped this country, and rightly want answers. The public and media response is hyper-focused on the connection between serious mental health challenges and violence, calling for expansion of involuntary commitment laws as the solution.

[Multiple studies indicate](#) that people diagnosed with serious mental illnesses are no more likely than the general population to be violent. Further, risk assessment studies indicate that gun control is a more effective way to reduce violence than a focus on serious mental illness alone.

NCMHR urges the public and the press to avoid scapegoating people with mental health challenges in attempts to address mass violence in our country. "What is called for is to examine the problem of gun violence directly," said Daniel Fisher, MD, PhD, an NCMHR board member who himself recovered from schizophrenia, "while simultaneously advocating for a quality health and mental health system where no one falls through the cracks, and people can access support before they reach the crisis point."

"A mental health-based approach to violence prevention among a very small population of individuals with serious mental illness will never sufficiently address the complex causes of violence in America," said Leah Harris, NCMHR director. "What is needed is a public health approach to reducing violence."

[According to the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), "Public health's long-term goal is lasting change in the factors and conditions that place people at risk. Such changes can occur through social ecology modifications that will reduce rates of violence in populations at the personal, family, community, and societal levels."

What is known about Elliot Rodger was that he was lonely and felt disconnected from his peers. What is also known is that social alienation was common to nearly all the individuals who committed mass violence, while the mental health and treatment status among them has varied widely.

The CDC cites [connectedness](#) as a critical factor in both violence and suicide prevention. What is needed is a national strategy to foster social connectedness in schools and on college campuses. Since young people are more likely to feel comfortable talking to their peers than to mental health professionals, peers can be trained in [Emotional CPR](#) to reach out to isolated students, and to help support each other through difficult times. Supports like the [Crisis Text Line](#) (CTL) can reach isolated youth who wouldn't normally call a hotline or seek in-person support. Focused messaging campaigns in schools and on college campuses could also help to address stigma and promote social connectedness.

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