



## **Position Statement**

### **Recovery and a Cure for Schizophrenia**

#### **The nature of schizophrenia has made a cure elusive.**

Our definition of “cure” is that the underlying pathology or cause of schizophrenia is identified and eliminated, resulting in a permanent disappearance of all symptoms of the illness.

Neurodevelopmental disorders such as schizophrenia have multifaceted causes, including genetic and environmental factors, and many are still unknown. Because there is no clear singular cause, it has been difficult to find and target one mechanism for treatment. In contrast, diseases such as HIV/AIDS or cancer have known biological targets (the virus, the tumor) that can be addressed directly, even if the disease mechanism is complex.

Because schizophrenia is a neurodevelopmental illness, it involves changes in brain structure and function. The brain changes caused by schizophrenia occur early in life, making them difficult to modify. Thus, it is a monumental task to develop an intervention aimed at “curing” or fundamentally altering the disease’s development.

Beyond this, schizophrenia poses a unique challenge as it is a poorly defined condition with varied symptoms and trajectories. Until the construct of schizophrenia is clearly defined, we cannot easily develop a treatment target or even determine whether we have cured the illness.

#### **S&PAA firmly believes in the pursuit of a cure for schizophrenia.**

The ambitious quest for a schizophrenia cure may take decades, but it should be the pinnacle of our research and clinical aspirations. A conceivable roadmap for a cure would involve the following steps:

- Identification of specific causes (e.g., genetic, biological, environmental, psychosocial).
- Clarification of the construct of schizophrenia (e.g., if there are different subtypes of schizophrenia based on different causes, such as genetic mutations that are responsible for some symptoms but not others).
- An emphasis on developing our neurobiological understanding of the illness (e.g., not just genetic causes, brain structures and neural circuits, but also other biological processes such as inflammation and immune system dysfunction).
- The development of targeted treatments based on the above knowledge (e.g., medications that adjust neurotransmitter activity, gene therapies for specific mutations, preventive efforts that address environmental triggers). In fact, prevention – stopping the disease before it occurs – could be the bedrock of a potential cure for schizophrenia.

### **In the absence of a cure, recovery is achievable.**

Many people with schizophrenia can achieve recovery, which in this context involves returning to work or school, having a family, enjoying friendships and social activities and engaging in a meaning-driven life. But this generally requires urgent, best-practice treatment and a range of integrated support services – the type of care that our fragmented healthcare system does not often provide.

If everyone with schizophrenia received early assessment and diagnosis, then had access to the full range of treatment and support, the picture of this illness would look vastly different. More people could live with manageable symptoms. Instead of following the path of unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, isolation, premature death and painful psychological distress, people with schizophrenia would have a real chance to harness their innate strengths, engage in work and school, integrate into their communities and build lives with hope, purpose and connection.

This is what people with schizophrenia and their families deserve, and it is fully achievable while we seek a cure.

### **Call to Action**

**S&PAA supports funding from the relevant federal, state and/or local resources to accomplish the following aims:**

1. **Research into the construct, causes and neurobiology of schizophrenia.** It is critical to clearly define and categorize the diverse presentations and severities of schizophrenia. Identifying different subtypes and their respective causes will pave the way for more precise therapeutic avenues tailored to each subtype. Additionally, we call for studies that focus on neurobiological, genetic and environmental contributors to schizophrenia. This will lay the foundation for developing targeted treatments and preventive measures, bringing us a step closer to a potential cure.
2. **Fund policies that promote recovery.** We advocate for policies that promote a comprehensive spectrum of services to support recovery. This includes facilitating access to education, early intervention and best practices for medication management, individual therapy, family interventions, education and employment programs, supportive housing, peer support groups and criminal justice diversion programs.
3. **Fund policies that help translate scientific breakthroughs to real-world applications.** A variety of effective treatments for schizophrenia exist, but they rarely reach those who need them. Thus, there is a need for more funding that supports the transformation of potential new breakthrough treatments into large-scale clinical use.