Top Officials Appeal to Entertainment Industry Storytellers

Creative Community Approached by Top Officials to Prioritize Drug Addiction and Suicide Prevention Stories of Hope

The Entertainment Industries Council (EIC) brought together leading content creators, standards & practices experts, social impact teams and top public health officials last week to discuss the importance of accurately and responsibly depicting stories of hope about drug addiction and mental health issues across entertainment content. Hosted at Viacom’s headquarters in New York, the event featured a panel that included VADM U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Director, James Carroll and Department of Veteran Affairs National Office of Suicide Prevention Director, Dr. Keita Franklin. In addition to Viacom, representatives from Fox, NBCUniversal and YouTube also participated.

“Through the powerful medium of entertainment, we can bring to life important stories about addiction and suicide to better educate audiences about these complex health issues, reduce public stigma and instill the message of hope that comes with treatment and recovery,” said Marie Gallo Dyak, President and CEO of EIC.

Dr. Adams informed the audience that suicide and addiction are often co-occurring conditions. Director Carroll reinforced that although we hear about the unacceptable number of deaths from opioids, methamphetamines and cocaine deaths are also on the rise. Dr. Franklin shared how the entertainment industry can help by how they depict veterans at risk and by understanding hope and recovery as it applies to suicide prevention. All emphasized the effectiveness of publicizing key resources and tools for audiences, including help lines such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK; press 1 for Vets.

Sharing the story of his own brother, Dr. Adams said, “More than 50% of overdoses happen in our homes. Those suffering from addiction are our family members, friends and neighbors. And they should be portrayed as such on television.”

ONDCP Director Carroll stated that “Improving the way the disease of addiction is portrayed in the television shows, movies, and music Americans consume is critical to reducing stigma and ultimately getting people the help they need. It is important for consumers to see an accurate depiction of drug use, addiction, and treatment, as well as the many incredible stories of hope and recovery.”

According to Dr. Franklin, “We, as a Nation, must continuously look for ways to care for and honor our Veterans. Collaboration with the Entertainment Industry affords us a wonderful opportunity to reach Veterans and their families in new and innovative ways – with targeted messages of hope. We, at the Department of Veteran Affairs, are excited to partner with EIC to put these unique outreach opportunities into practice.”

EIC will continue to provide expertise to content creators to address their specific audiences with stories of recovery and hope. The Entertainment Industries Council’s Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Briefing for Entertainment Writers was made possible in part by funding from the ALKERMES INSPIRATION GRANTS® program. The ALKERMES INSPIRATION GRANTS® program
supports the comprehensive needs of people affected by mental health and substance use disorders.
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“Millions of people are impacted by mental illness and addiction, including members of my own family, and all too often, are misrepresented in media and entertainment. We have an opportunity to truly influence positive change by bringing greater accuracy and empathy to portrayals of the challenges people living with these diseases and their families face,” said Jeff Winton, Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Alkermes. “The Entertainment Industries Council and Viacom are leaders in this significant step forward in the effort to encourage a more positive and productive dialogue.”

About Entertainment Industries Council
EIC is a non-profit organization founded in 1983 by leaders within the entertainment industry to bring the power and influence of the industry to communicate about health and social issues. The organization is considered to be the chief pioneer of entertainment and journalism outreach and a premiere success story in the field of entertainment education. This mission relies on providing science-based, non-judgmental resource information to the creative community and their audiences.