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Struggle and Solidarity: Seven Stories of How Americans Fought for Their Mental Health Through Federal Legislation

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Struggle and Solidarity: Seven Stories of How Americans Fought for Their Mental Health Through Federal Legislation, edited by Michael T. Compton, M.D., M.P.H. and Marc W. Manseau, M.D., M.P.H., is a remarkable journey of societal challenges, the individuals and legislation that rose to meet them, and the flood of downstream effects on the mental health and lives of all those who live in the United States. This publication is highly recommended for those who aim to learn about the historic forces that have shaped health in this country and their continued effects today, as the editors focus on seven stories with themes that ring true for all of us—food, employment, economic security, clean air and climate change, racial and gender equity, education, and housing. In doing so, readers, whether clinician or policymaker, are provided an exceptional display of the relationship between health outcomes, the social determinants of health, and the political and policy decisions that undergird them.

Unlike many books on policy, which read as dry and technical, the editorial choices in *Struggle and Solidarity* smartly situate the development of landmark legislation within human stories, contextualizing the emotion, suffering, and triumph in which they occurred. The format of the book flows easily, with each main chapter walking readers through the stories of advocates and policymakers who drew from their life experiences to push for progress against high resistance. Through the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, readers follow the story of farmers in the early 20th century to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) of today. With the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, we come to understand and appreciate that the history and health of the United States is closely tied to the history

and struggle for workers' rights. In the Social Security Act of 1935, the relationship between economic security and health is made clear, culminating in programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, which millions of Americans rely on today. The Clean Air Act of 1963 imparts important lessons about the role of government in ensuring a healthy environment for its citizens. Through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which hastened desegregation across the United States, we clearly see the need for continuous improvements, and the persisting challenges with moving towards a more just, equitable, and healthy society. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 demonstrates the importance of universally accessible education as a bedrock foundation for a productive and healthy population. And finally, through the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, the authors detail successes and failures of federal housing policy and the need for further work to ensure housing accessibility and quality, both being key determinants of health.

An increasing number of texts and scholarly articles have been published in the last few years on the social determinants of health, but many leave the reader without a framework for how changes in these determinants occur. In addition to highlighting the roles that physicians and advocates have played for decades, a key piece of learning imbued throughout is that the story and work of policymaking does not end with the writing, or even passing, of a bill. Here, policymaking is accurately depicted as a continuous and dynamic process that first begins with identifying a problem, then formulating a governmental response through legislation, which must be equally followed by mechanisms for implementation and administration of solutions. Further efforts are then required to evaluate the effectiveness of response and propose needed improvements, thus continuing the cycle—and a call to action.

In this volume, the authors provide us with a compelling reminder—that all policy is health policy—and the laws that have the largest effect on health may not look like health-related legislation on the surface. The authors effectively

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demonstrate the profound impact of federal legislation on the social determinants of mental health while inspiring readers to engage in the political process of health. This book will serve as a valuable resource for mental health professionals, policy makers, and advocates seeking a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between policy and

mental health. By illuminating the past, *Struggle and Solidarity* provides us with a guide to possibilities for the future of mental health policy development and implementation.

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