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## **The Recovery Road: A 1,776-Mile Walk Around Minnesota Aims to Expose America's Youth Mental Health Crisis—And Force Action**

*A crucial awareness campaign to turn lived experience into national policy, funding, and change.*

### **Relevant Dates for Content**

May: Mental Health Awareness Month

September: Suicide Prevention and Recovery

October: Depression/Mental Health Screening Month

October 10: World Mental Health Day

**MINNESOTA (Summer/Fall 2026)** — At a time when America's youth mental health crisis continues to deepen, one initiative is taking an unprecedented approach: walking straight through it. *The Recovery Road* is a 1,776-mile journey around the state of Minnesota—to counties, to communities—to document the real, on-the-ground reality of youth mental health and substance use in America. But Minnesota is just the beginning. The urgency for a national model is undeniable.

In the U.S., suicide, self-harm, and substance use disorders cost more than \$1 trillion annually in healthcare, lost productivity, and societal impact. But advocates argue the true cost is measured in lives—and in missed opportunities to intervene early.

The Recovery Road is designed to close that gap between what is known—and what is proven.

### **Why this story now:**

- The U.S. continues to face rising rates of youth mental health challenges and substance use, yet large parts of the country—especially rural communities—remain effectively unmapped in terms of services.
- No comparable effort has attempted to systematically collect lived experience + service gaps in real time across an entire state.
- The project is explicitly designed as a **national model**, with Minnesota as its first proof point.

### **What makes this different from a typical awareness campaign: A New Model for Accountability**

The campaign doesn't end at the final mile. It delivers a structured set of outputs aimed directly at policymakers, funders, and institutions:

- A real-time, public **Living Map** of community-level gaps
- A **Gap Report** breaking down needs by legislative district
- A **Policy Brief** delivered to leaders in St. Paul and Washington, D.C.
- A feature **Documentary** capturing the human stories behind the data
- An annual **Report Card** tracking whether meaningful change follows

The goal is clear: move beyond awareness campaigns and create a system where gaps are visible—and inaction is no longer defensible.

**“This isn’t about awareness anymore. It’s about evidence—and what we do with it,” said founder Jason Lennox, an activist and behavioral health advocate whose work is informed by his own recovery.**

Last year, Lennox launched the Recovery Road by walking 530 miles across 6 states through Appalachia, to the most underserved markets in the country, to raise awareness about the mental health crisis. His mileage was a tribute to the 307,000 lives lost in 2024 to suicide and addiction. This year the 1776 trek coincides with the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United States.

Lennox said the project aims to address what he describes as an undercounted and under-mapped crisis, particularly in rural communities where services are limited or nonexistent. Many counties in Minnesota lack adolescent mental health programs.

**Nationally, about 1 in 5 teens with depression also develop a substance use disorder, and 90% of adults with substance use disorder began using as adolescents, according to widely cited public health data.**

Participants across the country are encouraged to join by walking in their own communities, logging miles, and raising funds tied to the campaign. Proceeds will support the One Arrow Foundation, which provides grants for prevention, treatment, crisis intervention and recovery services in high-need areas.

Organizers say 30% of funds raised will support logistics, storytelling and data collection, while 70% will go directly to community grants and longer-term systems change efforts.

While the walk is focused on Minnesota, it is intended as a model that could be replicated nationally to better document and address behavioral health needs at the community level.

The campaign is scheduled to launch on June 29<sup>th</sup> and runs through fall 2026.

**Visit [RecoveryRoad250.com](https://RecoveryRoad250.com) for more details.**