Kenneth Cole and the Mental Health Coalition

**The Challenge:** Fashion designer Kenneth Cole knew that America was undergoing a national mental health crisis. Having worked for decades to de-stigmatize AIDS, Kenneth had experience launching an advocacy campaign that shifts the culture of an issue. In early 2020, he formed the Mental Health Coalition (MHC), a joint effort with thirty of the country’s most prominent mental health organizations. MHC’s goal is to de-stigmatize and rebrand mental health and drive Americans to critical resources from the organizations that are making a difference. Kenneth approached TASC to help the coalition gain national media attention and form strategic partnerships with celebrities, influencers, policy leaders, corporations and organizations to create unique programs that would encourage people to talk honestly about mental health.

**Our Strategy:** TASC worked to develop Kenneth’s thought leadership and elevate him as a national expert on this issue. TASC identified national speaking opportunities, crafted core messaging, built partnerships with prominent influencers and forged relationships with key media outlets.

TASC began to generate national media attention for MHC in outlets such as *The Washington Post*, ABC News and *People Magazine*. We worked with new media, including important podcasts and niche publications, such as fashion-specific outlets and Black press outlets, to reach specific audiences. TASC worked to identify key moments in the news cycle for MHC’s message, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when Americans’ mental health suffered from this drastic change. During the national outcry for racial justice, we worked with MHC’s partners to reach out to and develop stories focused on the Black community in the NNPA, the national newspaper association that represents more than 200 African American community papers.

**Results:** Through comprehensive media coverage and successful influencer campaigns, MHC and Kenneth have become a major voice on the issue of mental health. TASC was able to secure interviews with prominent podcasts and print publications such as *The Washington Post*, *People Magazine* and an interview on ABC’s *Good Morning America* with Kenneth and MHC supporter Kendell Jenner. Celebrities, politicians and leaders supported the launch of MHC with video messages, tweets and social media posts. These influencers included Governor Cuomo, Chris Cuomo, Whoopi Goldberg, Keisha, Isiah Thomas, Justin Bieber, Deepak Chopra, Arianna Huffington, Doc Rivers, Jack Dorsey and many others. A social media Instagram campaign generated over 20 million likes and follows. Kenneth and Isiah Thomas brought MHC’s message to the Mental Health Summit at the 92nd Street Y, the Forbes Icons of Impact, Social Media Week, the Never Alone Summit, Harvard University and the Business of Fashion of Live.