

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 18, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We commend you and your administration's early leadership and determination to address the country's significant public health challenges. We write to urge strong federal support and funding to end the opioid and substance use disorder (SUD) crisis, which has been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As you work to develop and implement a comprehensive public health strategy and transmit the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2022 to Congress, we urge you to consider the needs of state, local, Tribal and territorial governments and treatment providers that are responding to the opioid and SUD crisis under the most challenging of circumstances. We respectfully request your support for federal grants and programs aimed at opioid and SUD prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the opioid and SUD prevention, treatment and recovery landscape in this country,¹ and the needs of patients, communities and providers are clear. The nature of the COVID-19 public health emergency has increased social isolation and stress while decreasing access to treatment and harm reduction resources, with significant repercussions for individuals facing addiction.² Reported overdoses and deaths have spiked over the past year, even as vital federal resources were delayed due to inaction in spite of the scale of need our communities continue to experience.³

The tremendous efforts of our states, supported by a pattern of significant federal investments, have made a difference and saved lives. Congress has long demonstrated a strong bipartisan commitment to addressing this epidemic through legislation such as the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (P.L. 115-271), and through annual appropriations bills that have prioritized targeted federal investments in opioid and SUD response funding. Importantly, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and 2021 funding legislation gave states, localities and tribes the necessary flexibility to respond to the changing nature of this crisis by ensuring that State Opioid Response (SOR) grant funding could be used to address misuse of cocaine and methamphetamines, in addition to opioids.

Further, important emergency funding for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) grants has been appropriated in COVID-19 response legislation, and we are pleased to see that your American Rescue Plan includes \$4 billion in funding to increase access to opioid

¹<https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/full/10.7326/M20-1212>

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7282772/>

³[https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html#:~:text=Over%2081%2C000%20drug%20overdose%20deaths,Control%20and%20Prevention%20\(CDC\).](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html#:~:text=Over%2081%2C000%20drug%20overdose%20deaths,Control%20and%20Prevention%20(CDC).)

and SUD and behavioral health services.⁴ In addition to the need for additional emergency funding for opioid and SUD grant programs in future COVID-19 response legislation, we urge you to support additional Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) and State Opioid Response (SOR) grant funding in the FY22 budget, with continued flexibility, to address this crisis.

In addition, it has never been more important to follow the public health guidance and embrace harm reduction strategies as an effective tool to reduce medical emergencies, drug overdoses and deaths.⁵ It is critical to fight against stigma and take an all-of-the-above approach in combating the opioid and SUD epidemic. To this end, we urge you to prioritize and expand funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Infectious Disease and the Opioid Epidemic Program to support and expand essential services for overdose prevention, including harm reduction services. Further, we ask for your administration to support in any way possible ongoing harm reduction efforts at the state, local, Tribal and territorial level, such as syringe services programs (SSPs), including by ensuring SOR and SAPT funding can be used for these harm reduction purposes.

Finally, the nation's opioid and SUD treatment providers play a critical role in battling the addiction crisis, and they have done so under challenging circumstances long before the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask for your support of our heroic SUD treatment workforce in your budget request, including by prioritizing funding for SUD professional loan repayment and provider training grant programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

Despite the strong federal investment in the past few years, the opioid and SUD epidemic continues to evolve and ravage communities across the country, and the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to exacerbate this crisis. We urge you to support robust additional funding to fully support the needs of providers and state, local, Tribal and territorial governments as they work to prevent and treat substance use disorders during this challenging time. It is essential that we commit to allocating resources to a range of evidence-based public health programs, and that we fund these efforts at a level that appropriately reflects the magnitude of this crisis. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

⁴https://buildbackbetter.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID_Relief-Package-Fact-Sheet.pdf

⁵https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6665260_A_review_of_the_efficiency_and_effectiveness_of_harm_reduction_strategies_for_alcohol_tobacco_and_illicit_drugs

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema
Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Ben Ray Luján
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine
Tim Kaine
United States Senator