United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

Thank you for your leadership of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related Agencies (L-HHS) Appropriations Subcommittee and for your commitment to addressing the devastating substance use disorder (SUD) crisis affecting our country. We appreciate your dedication to strengthening overdose surveillance and monitoring in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 funding bill, and we urge you to again provide robust funding in FY24 for evidence-based drug overdose prevention and surveillance and continue to ensure this funding may be used to track and prevent all drug-related overdoses, including opioids, stimulants, benzodiazepines, and poly-substance related overdoses.

As the Committee is aware, the addiction crisis continues to take a devastating toll on our nation. According to the CDC, drug overdoses caused 107,622 deaths in 2021, a 15 percent increase from 2020 and once again setting a record for highest annual total. Deaths from drug overdoses affect the entire United States population – spanning race, gender, and age – but disproportionately affect communities of color and rural counties. There has been a shift away from prescription medication to illicit drugs, including fentanyl, xylazine, other synthetic opioids, and poly-substance use. Timely and accurate data are vital for making important policy decisions by helping to identify trends and prioritize resources.

The CDC's Overdose Data to Action program currently provides funding for extensive overdose surveillance activities to 47 states, two territories, 16 localities, and 11 tribal centers. This funding helps improve the tracking of drug-involved overdoses, both fatal and nonfatal, and helps capture comprehensive information on toxicology, death scene investigations, route of administration, and other risk factors associated with fatal overdoses. It also supports syndromic surveillance of emergency department and emergency medical services data to identify patterns in nonfatal overdoses, and identify and address emerging drug threats, such as the uptick in methamphetamine and cocaine related deaths. Furthermore, the program is a pioneer in tracking the linkage to care continuum, so that we can better understand the barriers that people face in accessing treatment and successfully completing treatment after a nonfatal overdose. Surveillance findings are disseminated to key stakeholders in a timely manner to inform effective, evidence-based overdose prevention and response efforts. Finally, the CDC's Overdose Data to Action program helps build harm reduction strategies and strengthen resiliency in communities – an aspect of the program that has been especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic when individuals are more isolated.

Furthermore, portions of this surveillance funding directly support medical examiners and coroners, including comprehensive toxicology testing. The program also partners with labs to conduct more testing for nonfatal cases. The addiction crisis has not only besieged the health of our nation but also overwhelmed the capacity of our forensic medicine community. By allocating funding to forensic medicine services, the overdose surveillance program provides valuable support for all our public health professions working on the frontlines of the drug addiction crisis.

Now in its fourth year, CDC's Overdose Data to Action Program recently released two new funding opportunities, focused on interventions that reflect the continued evolution of this epidemic, including the recent rise in stimulant and polysubstance use, and changes in the illicit drug supply. These opportunities are also intended to help recipients prioritize data-informed strategies to help save lives and advance health equity.

Robust funding for the CDC's Overdose Data to Action Program will strengthen surveillance systems, including integration with state Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs for identification and overdose prevention. The program has developed innovative harm-reduction strategies that focus on increasing access to vital medications such as naloxone and ensuring that these medications are being used effectively. The recently announced funding opportunities will build on this past work and continue to enhance understanding of how best to prevent overdose and death in different groups in people. Expanding and strengthening these surveillance programs will ensure we have the data necessary to engage in effective prevention efforts and turn the tide against the fast-moving epidemic of overdoses.

We recognize your commitment to careful consideration of the many domestic health, labor, and education programs that require assistance in FY24 and thank you for your continued leadership. We urge you to make the collection of timely and accurate overdose data in the U.S. a top priority by providing robust funding in FY24 for the CDC's Overdose Data to Action surveillance and prevention programs, and ensuring the funding made available can be used to address the full spectrum of the addiction epidemic, including opioids, stimulants, benzodiazepines, new synthetics, and poly-substance use.
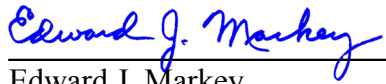
Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown
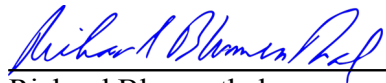United States Senator

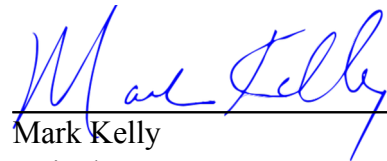Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator
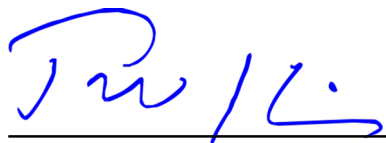
Edward J. Markey
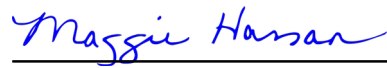United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Mark Kelly
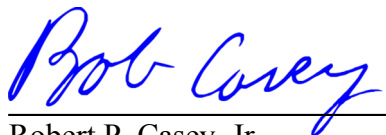United States Senator

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