

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 7, 2021

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

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

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

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) 2021 funding bill, and we urge you to again provide robust funding in FY22 for evidence-based drug overdose prevention and surveillance and ensure this funding may be used to track and prevent all drug-related overdoses, including opioids, stimulants, benzodiazepines, and poly-substance related overdoses.

Robust funding for the Overdose Data to Action program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that is not limited to initiatives focused on opioids or stimulants will strengthen overdose surveillance and prevention activities and continue to provide critical support to communities and states across the country as the addiction crisis continues to evolve and overdose deaths surge. We commend the Subcommittee for directing CDC to expand its prevention and surveillance efforts under CDC's Overdose Data to Action program to stimulants in its FY21 mark, and we encourage you to build on this program by providing CDC with additional flexibility to extend prevention and surveillance efforts to more broadly, to benzodiazepines and poly-substances.

As the Committee is aware, the addiction crisis continues to take a devastating toll on our nation. According to CDC, drug overdoses caused over 70,630 deaths in 2019. While overdose deaths were on the rise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to preliminary CDC data, drug overdoses caused more than 87,000 deaths in the 12-month period ending in September 2020 – a nearly 29 percent increase over the previous 12-months and the highest it has been since the opioid epidemic began. Although we have made progress in this struggle by some measures, drug overdoses continue to significantly contribute to mortality in the United States. Deaths from drug overdoses affect the entire United States population – spanning race, gender, and age, but disproportionately affect communities of color. Timely and accurate data are vital for making important policy decisions by helping to identify trends and prioritize resources.

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. Surveillance findings are disseminated to key stakeholders in a timely manner to inform effective, evidence-based overdose prevention and response efforts. Finally, 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 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 of our public health professions working on the grave frontlines of the drug addiction crisis.

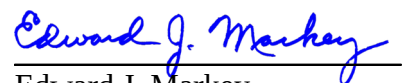
Robust funding for CDC's Overdose Data to Action Program will strengthen surveillance systems, including integration with state Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs for identification and overdose prevention. Expanding and strengthening these surveillance programs will ensure we have the data necessary 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 FY22, 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 FY22 for 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, and poly-substance use.

Sincerely,



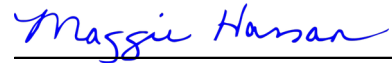
Sherrod Brown
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



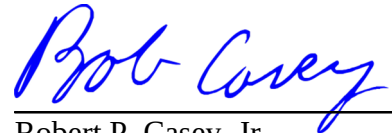
Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



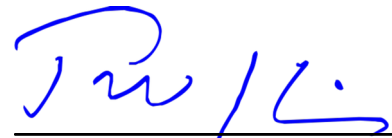
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



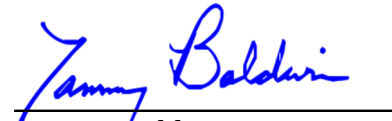
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



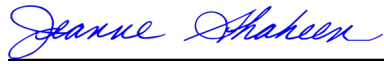
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



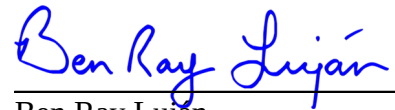
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



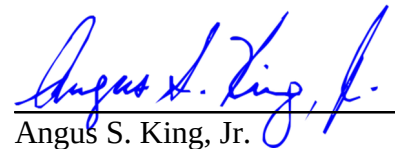
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



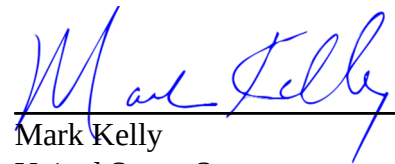
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United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator