

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 6, 2021

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

As more Americans receive a COVID-19 vaccine each day, we are beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel. However, while our nation has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, we are mindful that the addiction and mental health crises our country faces have not gone away. In fact, the economic downturn, social isolation, and stress associated with the pandemic have exacerbated these already dire public health crises.

Since 1999, more than 600,000 Americans have died from a drug overdose, and new numbers from the CDC indicate that more Americans died from a drug overdose in 2020 than ever before. While we don't have complete data for the year, the CDC recently reported that 87,000 Americans died of an overdose from October 2019 - September 2020, the highest number ever recorded over 12 months and a 29% increase over 2019 data. Overdoses surged in April and May last year as the economy collapsed, treatment programs closed, and necessary public health measures kicked in. The data from the CDC also shows that this crisis touches every corner of the country, but overdose deaths are disproportionately affecting Black Americans, Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives.

Rates of anxiety and depression are also up as people struggle with the loss of loved ones, prolonged isolation, concerns of unemployment, and illness. Of the more than 30% of American adults who recently reported having symptoms consistent with an anxiety and/or depressive disorder, over 20% reported needing, but not receiving, mental health counseling or therapy. In June of 2020, more than 40% of surveyed adults reported a negative mental or behavioral health condition related to COVID, including 31% who reported anxiety or depression symptoms, 13% who started or increased their substance use, and 11% who seriously considered suicide over the past month.

Behind these statistics are Americans and their families, struggling to get the help they desperately need. While Congress has provided billions in new funding to address addiction and mental health, we need a whole of government response to these crises that is coordinated by the White House. We write today to suggest the White House convene a national conference or symposium on mental health and substance use. Such a conference could bring together a wide

range of stakeholders, including individuals with lived experience with substance use and mental health disorders; those who work in the fields of prevention, treatment, and recovery; community organizations; legislators; representatives from federal agencies; local, state, and federal law enforcement; payers; and researchers. Such a conference could have the following goals: identify the most pressing challenges in addressing substance use and mental health disorders and identify the greatest opportunities to make meaningful change. Our approach to solving these crises must be multifaceted. We must increase prevention efforts and access to treatment, recovery, and support resources; invest in our behavioral health workforce to end provider shortages; reduce the supply of illicit substances; and end the stigma that prevents Americans from accessing treatment, among other priorities. Conference participants could identify actions that can be taken by Congress, the Executive Branch, states, and other entities to address these crises and encourage implementation across the federal government and at the state and local levels.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to working with the Biden Administration on a bipartisan basis to take real action that will save lives.

Sincerely,



David Trone  
Member of Congress  
Co-Chair, Bipartisan Addiction and  
Mental Health Task Force



Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress  
Co-Chair, Bipartisan Addiction and  
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Ann McLane Kuster  
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Jaime Herrera Beutler  
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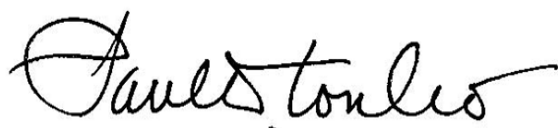
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress  
Co-Chair, Congressional Mental Health  
Caucus



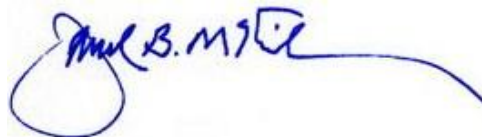
John Katko  
Member of Congress  
Co-Chair, Congressional Mental Health  
Caucus



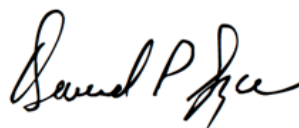
Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress  
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David B. McKinley, P.E.  
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David P. Joyce  
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