

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 5, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Republican Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Democratic Leader Schumer,

Thank you for your leadership as we navigate this difficult time for the American people. We are pleased that prior COVID-19 response packages have prioritized funding for mental health services, substance use disorder, and medical research. The need to fund these priorities has never been greater, and we respectfully request that you include the highest possible amounts of funding for mental health support, substance use disorder services, and medical research in the relief package currently under negotiation.

Mental Health Services

Significant research is still required to understand the full mental health impact of COVID-19. Despite a lack of data, research into past large-scale traumas enables us to anticipate the pandemic's effects and subsequent need for mental health services. Scientists have discovered that 40% of recovered patients from the 2003 SARS epidemic were left with a psychiatric illness such as post-traumatic stress syndrome.¹ The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) anticipates 10-15% of the population will experience long-term health impacts from COVID-19 and would benefit from evidence-based interventions. Recent data from the Census Bureau suggests a similar mental health crisis due to COVID-19; over 30% of Americans are already showing signs of clinical anxiety or depression.² We should anticipate a surge of new mental

¹ Lam, Marco Ho-Bun. "Mental Morbidities and Chronic Fatigue in Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Survivors." *Archives of Internal Medicine*, vol. 169, no. 22, American Medical Association (AMA), Dec. 2009, p. 2142. *Crossref*, doi:10.1001/archinternmed.2009.384.

² "Mental Health - Household Pulse Survey - COVID-19." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>.

health needs as a result of COVID-19 and provide robust funding to meet this coming challenge head-on in order to expand access to effective treatments.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported a record number of overdose deaths in 2019 (70,980 total). Fatal overdoses increased by almost 5% from 2018 to 2019,³ and the evidence shows us the pandemic will only exacerbate this trend. Overdoses increased 29% in April and 42% in May compared to those months in 2019.⁴ Some parts of the country have seen fatal overdoses increase by 50% compared to last year.⁵ While Congress has rightly focused on the COVID-19 response, we cannot lose sight of the addiction crisis. Congress must provide substantive funding to SAMHSA to increase prevention efforts and ensure that individuals with substance use disorders are connected to treatment, despite the additional barriers posed by COVID-19.

Mental and Behavioral Health Treatment Providers

Cancellations of procedures and appointments due to COVID-19 have reduced revenues for healthcare providers and hospitals, while the need for additional personal protective equipment and increased sanitation has increased expenses. Many providers and hospitals were eligible for grants or loans provided in previous COVID-19-response packages. However, as these funds were largely based on 2019 Medicare payments, many mental and behavioral healthcare providers were not eligible.⁶ A National Council for Behavioral Health survey found that 93% of community behavioral health organizations have reduced their services and 36% of small organizations have rescheduled or turned away patients.⁷ Under current conditions, just 6% of small organizations and 13% of larger organizations anticipate surviving another 12 months.⁹ We cannot allow 90% of community behavioral health organizations, which are critical in treating individuals with mental illness and substance use disorder, to disappear during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a lack of funding.

³ “Products - Vital Statistics Rapid Release - Provisional Drug Overdose Data.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 July 2020, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm.

⁴ Wan, William, and Heather Long. “Cries for Help: Drug Overdoses Are Soaring during the Coronavirus Pandemic.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 1 July 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/07/01/coronavirus-drug-overdose/.

⁵ Raman, Sandhya. “Drug Overdoses Climb during COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Roll Call*, www.rollcall.com/2020/05/27/drug-overdoses-climb-during-covid-19-pandemic/.

⁶ Cunningham, Paige. “The Health 202: Coronavirus Could Worsen the Opioid Abuse Epidemic.” *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-health-202/2020/05/11/the-health-202-coronavirus-could-worsen-the-opioid-abuse-epidemic/5eb5ab2388e0fa17cddf6673/>

⁷ “Behavioral Health Crisis in America Getting Worse as COVID-19 Forces Community Behavioral Health Care Organizations to Cut Back.” National Council for Behavioral Health, 16 April 2020. <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/behavioral-health-crisis-in-america-getting-worse-as-covid-19-forces-community-behavioral-health-care-organizations-to-cut-back/>

This lack of funding is particularly concerning for organizations that combine physical health, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment to provide 24/7 crisis care. Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs) work with law enforcement and schools, and coordinate with hospitals to reduce emergency department visits. Due to their central role in the provision of mental health services, CCBHCs are a critical component to any COVID-19 response. Additional federal support is necessary to help CCBHCs meet the increased need to provide primary and behavioral health care while giving hospitals space to treat this pandemic.

Medical Research

COVID-19 is an incredibly complex disease that leaves some infected individuals unscathed, while quickly killing others. It can cause a broad range of symptoms from loss of taste to nausea,⁸ and can seemingly impact almost every organ system.⁹ Older individuals and those with preexisting conditions are at a higher risk for poor outcomes,¹⁰ and a multisystem inflammatory syndrome has been associated with COVID-19 in children.¹¹ Little is known about the long-term effects for those who have survived infection, but reports show that some individuals experience symptoms for months.¹² Extensive research is needed to better understand virus transmission, its impact on different organ systems, additional risks posed to specific populations and how they can be mitigated, which treatments are the most effective, and long-term outcomes of the disease. It is imperative that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) receive robust funding to conduct this critical research.

In addition to providing funding for new research, the next COVID-19-response bill must include funding to resume NIH-funded research, which takes place across the country. Resources will be needed to safely reopen laboratories and continue work that has been paused since the beginning of the pandemic. This funding will preserve jobs in every state and ensure that the research started months ago is not lost.

As Congress continues to address the needs of the American people, we must ensure that we safeguard the general health and wellbeing of our communities. Medical research and mental and behavioral health support services will be crucial components of recovering from this pandemic

⁸ "Symptoms of Coronavirus." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html.

⁹ "Zaim, Sevim, et al. "COVID-19 and Multiorgan Response." *Current Problems in Cardiology*, Mosby-Year Book, Aug. 2020, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7187881/.

¹⁰ Wortham, Jonathan. "Characteristics of Persons Who Died with COVID-19 - United States, February 12–May 18, 2020." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 July 2020, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6928e1.htm.

¹¹ "HAN Archive - 00432." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Mar. 2020, emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00432.asp.

¹² "The Long-Term Health Effects of COVID-19." *Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance*, www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/long-term-health-effects-covid-19.

and preparing for the next one. Therefore, we respectfully request the highest possible funding for these services. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/

Andy Kim
Member of Congress

/s/

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

/s/

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

/s/

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/

Abigail D. Spanberger
Member of Congress

/s/

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

/s/

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Max Rose
Member of Congress

/s/

Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress

/s/

Anthony Brown
Member of Congress

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Jennifer Wexton
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Jason Crow
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Susie Lee
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Andy Levin
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Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

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Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

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Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

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Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

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TJ Cox
Member of Congress

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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

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Susan Wild
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Elissa Slotkin
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Madeleine Dean
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Jared Golden
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Tony Cárdenas
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Marcy Kaptur
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Chris Pappas
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Angie Craig
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Paul D. Tonko
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Jamie Raskin
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Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

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Kendra Horn
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Josh Gottheimer
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Conor Lamb
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Sharice L. Davids
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Brian Fitzpatrick
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Lucy McBath
Member of Congress

/s/

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress

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Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

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Haley Stevens
Member of Congress

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Katie Porter
Member of Congress

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Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress

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Lauren Underwood
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Mike Levin
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Ann McLane Kuster
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Antonio Delgado
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Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

/s/

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

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Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress

/s/

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

/s/

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

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Peter Welch
Member of Congress

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Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

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Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

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Anthony Brindisi
Member of Congress

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José E. Serrano
Member of Congress