

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on  
Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on  
Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

We are writing to urge you to make a substantial investment in mental and behavioral health in the Phase IV COVID-19 relief package. As COVID-19 takes its toll on the physical health of hundreds of thousands of Americans, we must immediately address and plan for the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of this pandemic on our nation's collective mental health. A recent poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that 45 percent of adults say the pandemic has already affected their mental health, with 19 percent saying it has had a major impact.<sup>1</sup>

In these unprecedented times, Congress must especially address the needs of particularly vulnerable individuals during the outbreak, including –

- individuals with mental illness, including the 5.3 million people with mental illness who are uninsured;<sup>2</sup>
- individuals with substance use disorder (SUD), who may experience difficulties with relapse and recovery in isolation and are at additional risk for contracting COVID-19;
- health care workers, first responders, and other essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic;
- educators, school administrators, and school support staff dealing with the sense of loss and frustration that comes with a rapid shifting to remote learning with little time to prepare and often limited access to resources for online learning;
- individuals who have lost loved ones to COVID-19, are recovering from the virus themselves, and/or are experiencing trauma;
- children and students navigating the uncertainty and instability that comes with living through a pandemic;
- older adults, including those experiencing cognitive decline or dementia; and

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<sup>1</sup> Kirzinger, A. et al. (2020, April 2). KFF Health Tracking Poll – Early April 2020: The Impact of Coronavirus on Life in America. *Kaiser Family Foundation*. <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-early-april-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> Mental Health America. (2019). The State of Mental Health In America. *MHA*. [https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2019%20MH%20in%20America%20Final\\_0.pdf](https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2019%20MH%20in%20America%20Final_0.pdf)

- individuals who have lost their jobs or are experiencing financial hardship due to the economic impacts of the pandemic, including the 6.6 million people who applied for unemployment insurance in the first week of April alone.<sup>3</sup>

Many Americans have been coping with mental illness and addiction long before the pandemic, and they are especially vulnerable during this time. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in five U.S. adults experience mental illness, one in 25 adults experience serious mental illness, and 17 percent of youth aged 6 to 17 experience a mental health disorder.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, 19.7 million Americans aged 12 and older battled a SUD in 2017. In the same year, an estimated 8.5 million adults aged 18 and over, or 3.4 percent of all adults, experienced a co-occurring mental health disorder and SUD.<sup>5</sup>

The pandemic may also exacerbate existing disparities in the mental health care system in the U.S. For individuals in marginalized communities, including racial and ethnic minority groups, mental health challenges are often compounded by systemic disparities such as insufficient access to resources and services, stigma surrounding mental illness, and lack of access to culturally-competent mental health care. Statistics show that 25 percent of Asian adults, 31 percent of black adults, 33 percent of Hispanic adults, and 32 percent of adults of multiracial descent that have a mental health diagnosis received treatment or counseling in the past year - compared to 49 percent of white adults.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, our behavioral health workforce was experiencing a shortage prior to the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>7</sup> Failure to invest resources into both our mental health and SUD services and our behavioral health workforce risks aggravating these gaps.

We appreciate that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$425 million for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as well as the extension of community mental health services demonstration projects to two more states. However, these funds will be insufficient to address the mental health crisis brought on by this public health emergency. In light of the severity of this pandemic on mental and behavioral health, we make a substantial investment in this area and incorporate the following recommendations in the forthcoming Phase IV COVID-19 relief package:

1. **Increase funding for the expansion of the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) programs.** The MHBG is administered by SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services, and provides grants to states and territories to carry out plans for providing comprehensive community mental health services. Grantees have the flexibility to use funds for both new programs or to supplement

<sup>3</sup> Department of Labor. (2020, April 9). News Release: Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims. *DOL*. <https://www.dol.gov/ui/data.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2019, September). Mental Health by the Numbers. *NAMI*. <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-by-the-numbers>

<sup>5</sup> Bose, J. et al. (2018, September). Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHFFR2017/NSDUHFFR2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2019). Mental Health Care Matters. *NAMI*. <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Mental-Health-Care-Matters-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Pellitt, S. (2018, December 13). New Federal Analysis of Behavioral Health Care Workforce Released. *National Council for Behavioral Health*. <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/capitol-connector/2018/12/new-federal-analysis-of-behavioral-health-care-workforce-released/>

- current activities to support mental health, targeting both adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbances. An increase in funding for MHBG will allow states to respond to the needs of individuals experiencing mental illness during the COVID-19 outbreak.
2. **Expand the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCTSI) and support for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)**, focusing on efforts to address the trauma experienced by children in the wake of the pandemic. The initiative and its accompanying network provide several tools and resources to help children, their families, and first responders navigate the traumatic stress of this pandemic. These include a psychological first aid kit for responders to provide early intervention to children, adolescents, adults, and families impacted by traumatic events, a guide for parents and caregivers for coping with COVID-19, activities for children and adolescents amidst the outbreak, a disaster distress helpline, and ongoing research through the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress to improve interventions and care during the pandemic.
  3. **Increase funding for mental and behavioral health training and education programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** that train new providers to enter the field, support current providers to improve their practice, and fund opportunities for education. The mental and behavioral health workforce was strained to meet the needs of Americans before this pandemic. As more people feel the stress and strain, the demand for services will grow. Programs at HRSA, such as the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Program, expand and develop the substance abuse and behavioral health workforce.
  4. **Increase funding for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SBG) programs.** These critical SAMHSA funds provide funding directly to states to address the substance use disorder and substance abuse needs of their citizens through prevention, treatment, and recovery. The added stress of the pandemic coupled with the realities of social isolation can exacerbate challenges for those already struggling with addiction or those relying on self-medication with substances. This funding will support those in recovery in maintaining their sobriety while preventing the development of more substance use disorders and substance misuse.
  5. **Increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suicide prevention programs.** While the CARES Act allocated \$50 million of the funds provided to SAMHSA for suicide prevention, additional funding is necessary to address the crisis. The CDC supports suicide prevention programs in a number of ways, including through data surveillance through the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and technical support for states and communities to use this data to inform suicide prevention programs. Bolstering funding for these efforts can help states and communities target their prevention programs to vulnerable groups both during and after the pandemic.
  6. **Assist behavioral health providers with the paradigm shift to telehealth.** Providers may be struggling to adapt to online visits without sacrificing the personal connection to patients, while juggling various licensing rules, their own well-being,

and an influx of patients, all while confronting disparities in telehealth access across states during this crisis.<sup>8</sup>

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to support the mental and socioemotional wellbeing of Americans throughout this global crisis.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tim Kaine

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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

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Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

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<sup>8</sup> Federation of State Medical Boards. (2020, April 9). States Modifying Licensure Requirements/Renewals for Physicians in Response to COVID-19. *FSMB*. <https://www.fsmb.org/siteassets/advocacy/pdf/state-emergency-declarations-licensure-requirements-covid-19.pdf>

Ravindranathan, M. (2020, April 9). America's having a nervous breakdown. Can telemedicine fix it? *Politico PRO*. <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2020/04/americas-having-a-nervous-breakdown-can-telemedicine-fix-it-1908086>

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto

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Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith

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Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz

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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and  
Education, United States Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, and Education, United States Senate Appropriations Committee

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

We write to request the inclusion of S. 2661/ H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, in the next COVID-19 relief package. The creation of this three-digit dialing code is essential in order to address the growing suicide crisis across the United States. As our country is facing an unprecedented challenge in responding to COVID-19, this three-digit hotline would play a critical role in saving the lives of many vulnerable Americans who are facing mental health emergencies during this period of isolation and uncertainty. Suicide does not discriminate between rural and urban areas or by income, and it causes heartbreak and loss in communities in every single one of our states. We must ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent these devastating outcomes from occurring, especially in these trying times as grief and uncertainty encompass our nation.

In 2018, Congress acted in a bipartisan fashion to pass the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act, directing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to evaluate using a three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In August 2019, the FCC released its report, which found that a national three-digit line would improve suicide prevention, and it recommended a simpler number that Americans could dial in times of crisis: 9-8-8 and has moved forward with an official Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Right now, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a ten-digit long number for anyone contemplating suicide, and this lack of accessibility serves as a barrier to Americans seeking immediate help in a mental health crisis.

When someone is suffering from a heart attack or medical emergency, everyone knows to call 9-1-1, but for mental health emergencies, an easy-to-remember number does not exist. Because of this, we took bipartisan, bicameral steps to introduce or support S. 2661/ H.R. 4194 to designate 9-8-8 as the universal telephone number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline and to ensure states are able to support call centers as they deal with new levels of call volume. S. 2661 passed the Senate Commerce Committee on December 11, 2019 with unanimous support and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 33 senators, and H.R. 4194 passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology on March 10, 2020 with unanimous support and is cosponsored by a bipartisan group of 135 members of Congress.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act is not just smart policy that will save lives, but it is also a statement that our government recognizes our country's mental health crisis and is working across party lines to address it. On April 4, 2020, reports show that one call center in the network had only 22 crisis calls related to COVID-19 in February and that number grew by over 8,000% to 1,800 in March. Increasing the accessibility of life-saving services for people facing mental health crises will be a key step in fighting for a tomorrow in which Americans in crisis know they are not alone.

As our country is working together to address this virus, it is crucial that mental health support is at the forefront of all of our minds. Because of this, we urge you to include S. 2661/ H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, in the next COVID-19 relief package to ensure the expansion of accessibility to this life-saving hotline. Thank you for your continued support and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cory Gardner

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Cory Gardner  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Jerry Moran

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Jerry Moran  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Stewart

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Chris Stewart  
Member of Congress

/s/ Seth Moulton

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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

/s/ Greg Gianforte

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Greg Gianforte  
Member of Congress

/s/ Eddie Bernice Johnson

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Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

/s/ Todd Young

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Todd Young  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

/s/ Shelley Moore Capito

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Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator

/s/ Marsha Blackburn

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Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

/s/ Deb Fischer

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Deb Fischer  
United States Senator

/s/ Martha McSally

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Martha McSally  
United States Senator

/s/ John Hoeven

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John Hoeven  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema

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Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



/s/ Christopher A. Coons

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Fitzpatrick

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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

/s/ Pete Olson

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Pete Olson  
Member of Congress

/s/ Harley Rouda

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Harley Rouda  
Member of Congress

/s/ Tom Cole

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Tom Cole  
Member of Congress

/s/ Bonnie Watson Coleman

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Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress

/s/ David B. McKinley, P.E.

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David B. McKinley, P.E.  
Member of Congress

/s/ Tim Ryan

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Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

/s/ José E. Serrano

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José E. Serrano  
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger

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C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress

/s/ Ben McAdams

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Ben McAdams  
Member of Congress

/s/ Debbie Mucarsel-Powell

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Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Member of Congress

/s/ Abby Finkenauer

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Abby Finkenauer  
Member of Congress

/s/ Susan Wild

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Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you negotiate the next stimulus package to mitigate the health and economic effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, we request that you provide emergency funding to mental health disorder and addiction treatment providers across the country. Many organizations that primarily treat individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders (collectively, behavioral health organizations or “BHOs”) are at risk of closing their doors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate and long-term effects of this cannot be overstated as millions of Americans rely on BHOs to address their mental health and substance use disorder treatment needs. As such, we request that you provide at least \$38.5 billion in emergency funding to BHOs across the country that utilize evidence-based practices, with a significant portion of these emergency funds set aside for BHOs enrolled in Medicaid and provide care to underserved groups, or those who otherwise lack coverage for needed behavioral and mental health care.

Millions of individuals, children, and families across the country struggle with mental illness or addiction each and every day. According to the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 1 in 5 adults, over 47 million people, reported struggling with mental illness, and over 10 million reported suicidal thoughts.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are particularly concerning among the nation’s youth. 1 in 7 youth aged 12 to 17, or 3.5 million adolescents, reported experiencing a major depressive episode in 2018, and record numbers of adolescents have attempted or

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<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” August 2019, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf>

considered suicide in recent years.<sup>2</sup> In addition to age disparities, it has been found that people of color, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and people living in rural communities are less likely to have access to mental health care and more likely to receive lower quality care.<sup>3</sup> Further, over 20 million Americans are living with substance use disorder, including 2 million who have opioid use disorder.<sup>4</sup>

The numbers of Americans struggling with mental illness will only continue to grow as families and individuals face the emotional and economic repercussions of the pandemic. A recent poll found that the pandemic and its resultant social and economic impacts are already taking a heavy toll on Americans' mental health. 45 percent of respondents reported that the pandemic is negatively affecting their mental health, up from 32 percent just a month prior.<sup>5</sup> Experts have even suggested that long-term social distancing from friends, loved ones, and a departure from routine may have both short- and long-term psychological effects.<sup>6</sup> This, compounded with increasing financial strain and underlying disparities in mental health care access and quality of care, could have dire consequences. Anecdotal reports have indicated that rates of consumption of alcohol and other addictive substances are on the rise.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, social distancing measures have created barriers to accessing treatment, which has only been exacerbated by a scarcity of available providers as they either fall ill or become overloaded with patients.<sup>8</sup>

BHOs are crucial to the provision of behavioral health care to Americans across the country who rely on them for a variety of services, but are being burdened by the pandemic. BHOs may provide counseling services to individuals, families, and children struggling with depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and countless other mental illnesses. Additionally, licensed practitioners at BHOs may provide lifesaving medication assisted treatment to individuals with opioid and other substance use disorders. Without this medical treatment, patients in recovery are

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, "2016 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report," Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; July 2017. AHRQ Pub. No. 17-0001, April 27, 2020, <https://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqdr/nhqdr16/index.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Racial/Ethnic Health Disparities Among Rural Adults — United States, 2012–2015," Cara James, Ramal Moonesinghe, Shondelle Wilson-Frederick, Jeffrey Hall, Ana Penman-Aguilar, Karen Bouye, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Surveillance Summary 2017, 66 (No. SS-23):1–9, April 27, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/ss/ss6623a1.html>

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health," August 2019, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, "KFF Health Tracking Poll - Early April 2020: The Impact Of Coronavirus On Life In America," Ashley Kirzinger, Audrey Kearney, Liz Hamel, Mollyann Brodie, April 2, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-early-april-2020/>

<sup>6</sup> CNN, "Long-term social distancing may be traumatic," Madeline Holcombe, April 12, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/09/health/coronavirus-mental-health-long-term-wellness/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> USC News, "COVID-19 drives alcohol sales — and raises concerns about substance abuse," Gary Polakovic, April 14, 2020, <https://news.usc.edu/168549/covid-19-alcohol-sales-abuse-stress-relapse-usc-experts/>; Newsweek, "U.S. Alcohol Sales Increase 55 Percent In One Week Amid Coronavirus Pandemic," Jade Bremner, April 1, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/us-alcohol-sales-increase-55-percent-one-week-amid-coronavirus-pandemic-1495510>

<sup>8</sup> Stat News, "The Covid-19 crisis too few are talking about: health care workers' mental health," Jessica Gold, April 3, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/03/the-covid-19-crisis-too-few-are-talking-about-health-care-workers-mental-health/>

at higher risk for relapse, overdose, or overdose related death.<sup>9</sup> These services will become all the more important as COVID-19 continues to spread and the need for mental health disorder and addiction treatment services grows. However, because of the health and economic impacts of the pandemic and the growing number of patients, many BHOs are at risk of closing their doors. Some BHOs have projected nearly \$40 billion in lost revenue as a direct result of increased staff overtime to meet patient need, increased need for PPE, and the implementation of telehealth services.<sup>10</sup> The impact of such a shortfall would be significant, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt the lives of all Americans.

BHOs have not been sufficiently included in response efforts to date. Congress has passed four stimulus packages to bolster the nation's response to COVID-19. However, none have addressed the growing challenge to and need for BHOs. With a growing number of Americans in need of behavioral health services and many BHOs at risk of closing, the nation is headed towards another public health crisis. To avert another large-scale public health crisis, we must pass a stimulus package that prioritizes the financial security of these vital health care providers and the health of millions of Americans. As such, we respectfully request that at least \$38.5 billion in emergency aid is provided to BHOs that can meet at least one of the following three criteria: accredited by an independent, national accrediting organization or receive state or tribal funding or qualify as community mental health centers as defined in Section 1913(c) of the *Public Health Service Act*. This will allow these critical mental health and addiction treatment providers to keep their doors open and continue providing crucial treatment to Americans during these trying times. We are also supportive of efforts, led by our colleagues, to boost critical funding at the Department of Health and Human Services for mental and behavioral health initiatives, including the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and other Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Indian Health Service (IHS), and Health Resources and Services Administration programs, as well as specific programs that support the mental and behavioral health of American Indian and Alaska Native populations like the SAMHSA Tribal Behavioral Health Grants, and funding for the Mental Health and Alcohol & Substance Abuse line items in the IHS budget.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to working together to ensure that any economic stimulus package provides much needed relief for our nation's BHOs.

Sincerely,

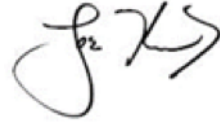
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<sup>9</sup> Food and Drug Administration, "Information about Medication Assisted Treatment," <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/information-drug-class/information-about-medication-assisted-treatment-mat>

<sup>10</sup> American Society of Addiction Medicine, "\$38.5 Billion Request to Congress for Emergency Funding to Avert Collapse of Behavioral Health Organizations Nationwide," April 7, 2020, [https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/letters-and-comments/request-to-congress-for-emergency-funding8b95339472bc604ca5b7ff000030b21a.pdf?sfvrsn=82953c2\\_2](https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/letters-and-comments/request-to-congress-for-emergency-funding8b95339472bc604ca5b7ff000030b21a.pdf?sfvrsn=82953c2_2)



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress



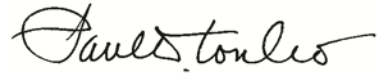
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



John Katko  
Member of Congress

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

Tom Udall  
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

David Trone  
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress

Lauren Underwood  
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress

Scott Peters  
Member of Congress

Max Rose  
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress

Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

William Gettman  
Member of Congress

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Albio Sires  
Member of Congress

Darren Soto  
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider  
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

Jeff Van Drew  
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress

Conor Lamb  
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

William R. Keating  
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr,  
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge  
Member of Congress

John B. Larson  
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack  
Member of Congress

André Carson  
Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Abigail Spanberger  
Member of Congress



May 15, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We are writing to urge you to include significant new investments in behavioral health care in the next legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) included just \$425 million in federal emergency discretionary funds for mental health and addiction treatment, which falls far short of what is needed to meet the growing needs of our communities. The Senate must ensure that those with mental illness and addiction are not left behind in this pandemic.

Prior to COVID-19, one in every five people suffered from a mental illness or substance use disorder, and the pandemic is expected to significantly increase the need for behavioral health care across the country. A recent poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that nearly half of Americans say that worry and stress related to the pandemic are hurting their mental health.<sup>i</sup> A federal emergency hotline for people in emotional distress registered a more than 1,000 percent increase in calls in April compared to last year.<sup>ii</sup> A report released this month estimated 75,000 Americans could die from suicide or drug and alcohol misuse as a result of the pandemic.<sup>iii</sup> Additionally, our doctors, nurses, and other frontline workers are at an increased risk for developing mental illness, including post-traumatic stress syndrome.

At a time when we need to be increasing access to mental health and addiction treatment, we are seeing the opposite, as longstanding weaknesses in our behavioral health funding system are exposed. A recent nationwide survey by the National Council for Behavioral Health found that nearly all (92.6%) of Community Behavioral Health Organizations nationwide have been forced to reduce their operations, and nearly two out of three centers believe that they can survive financially for only three months or less under current conditions.<sup>iv</sup> Without widely available community based care, Americans in crisis could overwhelm hospital emergency rooms or lose their lives.

We simply cannot afford to ignore this behavioral health crisis. With the right investments in behavioral health care, we believe that this country will meet the increased behavioral health needs during this challenging time and help millions of Americans recover. We urge you to commit to comprehensively addressing the challenges our communities face, including but certainly not limited to:

- Providing robust funding to ensure community behavioral health centers and other mental health and addiction treatment providers can serve patients. Many national behavioral health organizations have said that the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic demands \$38.5 billion in emergency funding to meet the increased needs.
- Ensuring strong support from existing and future funds through the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF). Behavioral health treatment providers have been largely left behind in the allocations of the fund to date.
- Ensuring telehealth parity for behavioral health services. Telehealth is a lifeline for behavioral health clinicians and their patients. To ensure access to needed behavioral health care during the pandemic, telehealth services, including audio-only services where appropriate, should be paid at the same rate as face-to-face visits. Congress must also ensure patients and providers have access to the technology they need.
- Providing additional personal protective equipment. Behavioral health providers need equipment including masks and gloves to keep themselves and their patients safe.
- Fully funding Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). With additional federal support, CCBHCs can help meet the tremendous increased need. Congress should fund the nine additional states that have previously applied for the CCBHC Demonstration Program. Congress should also provide additional funding for community clinics around the country that are seeking start-up funding.
- Providing additional funding for behavioral health research.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that Americans can get the behavioral health care they need during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Debbie Stabenow

Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith

Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Udall

Tom Udall  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>

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iii [https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT\\_Deaths-of-Despair\\_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf](https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT_Deaths-of-Despair_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf)

iv [https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NCBH\\_COVID19\\_Survey\\_Findings\\_04152020.pdf?daf=375ateTbd56](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NCBH_COVID19_Survey_Findings_04152020.pdf?daf=375ateTbd56)