

October 30, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, and Pensions  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care, is writing to express **our request that the Senate HELP Committee brings forward the reauthorization of the Substance Use-Disorder Prevention That Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act (SUPPORT Act; P.L. 115-271) in regular order.**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been dramatic increases in both mental illness and substance use disorders. Since 2019, 4 in 10 of American adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depression since the pandemic, previously recorded at 1 in 10.<sup>1</sup> 13% of Americans have reported increasing or starting substance use as a way of coping with stress related to the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Given that up to 50% of those with substance use disorders (SUDs) experience symptoms of mental illness, reports of substance abuse and the emerging fentanyl crisis have been on the rise as well.<sup>3</sup>

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in 2019, among youth, one in five had a major depressive episode, and more than half of those having such an episode did not receive treatment. According to the CDC, 29% of high school students reported poor mental health in 2021.<sup>4</sup> For young adults ages 18-25, nearly half, or 46%, had a substance use condition and/or a mental health condition.<sup>5</sup> A similar trend is found in maternal mental health conditions as suicide and overdose are leading contributors to maternal death. There is a strong correlation between maternal mental health conditions, substance use, and maternal mortality with 1 in 5 mothers suffering from a maternal mental health condition.<sup>6</sup>

Since the passage of the original SUPPORT Act in 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed serious and deadly upticks in mental health and substance use disorders, especially for young people and other populations at greater risk of exposure to and overdose from fentanyl. We strongly urge the Senate HELP Committee to increase authorizations of appropriations and make improvements to the base statute to account for pandemic impacts on co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders.

To ensure that all Americans receive care for co-occurring mental illnesses and SUDs, we urge the Committee to expeditiously bring forward the reauthorization of the SPPORT Act in regular order, in hopes to allow adequate time for Committee consideration and stakeholder input on how to further strengthen this crucial legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Substance use during COVID-19 pandemic: impact on the underserved communities](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2011-2021 \(cdc.gov\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> National Survey on Drug Use and Health

<sup>6</sup> [Maternal drug-related death and suicide are leading causes of postpartum death in California - American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology \(ajog.org\)](#)

Sincerely,

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology

American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (AAPP)

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Nurses Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Children's Hospital Association

Clinical Social Work Association

Collaborative Family Healthcare Association

Community Catalyst

Crisis Text Line

Emergency Nurses Association

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Inseparable

International OCD Foundation

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health (NACBH)

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

NHMH - No Health without Mental Health

Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health

REDC Consortium

RI International

Sandy Hook Promise

SMART Recovery

The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent  
Health

Treatment Communities of America