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October 7, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chairman, Health Subcommittee
House Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael Burgess
Ranking Member, Health Subcommittee
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Pallone and Eshoo, Ranking Members Walden and Burgess:

The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew), is a global research and public policy organization dedicated to serving the public. Operated as an independent, non-partisan, non-profit, Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.

For the past several years, Pew has performed in-depth research and analysis on strategies to address the nation's opioid crisis. Through its Substance Use Prevention and Treatment Initiative, Pew collaborates with states in their efforts to improve access to timely, comprehensive, evidence-based, and sustainable treatment for substance use disorders (SUD), specifically opioid use disorder (OUD).

Pew commends the House Energy and Commerce Committee for its efforts to combat the nation's opioid epidemic. We applaud the Committee's leadership in the passage of three landmark pieces of legislation—the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), the 21st Century Cures Act, and the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (SUPPORT Act)—that take a multifaceted approach to prevent and treat opioid misuse. We also commend Congress for making significant funding increases to programs that combat the epidemic; in FY 2017 and FY 2018, federal programs targeted at addressing the epidemic received a 124 percent increase.¹

In a September 18, 2019 letter to 16 governors, the Committee asks states to report on how federal funds are being used to support treatment, recovery, and prevention efforts. As the Committee reviews each state's response, Pew urges the Committee to use its authority to encourage states to make long-term investments in evidence-based treatment. Investments that

build and strengthen treatment provider networks— such as establishing medication units that administer medications for OUD in geographically remote areas or developing hub and spoke models where community-based opioid treatment providers work in tandem with specialty treatment centers— are essential to decreasing overdose death rates.

The CDC estimates that drug overdoses killed more than 70,000 Americans in 2017 alone.² Of those deaths, 47,600 died from overdosing on opioids.³ Yet this devastating loss of life is preventable. OUD is a complex relapsing brain disease for which there is effective treatment. A conclusive body of evidence demonstrates that medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the most effective way to treat OUD. MAT combines one of the medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of OUD—methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone—with non-drug therapy, such as counseling. People who receive MAT are less likely to die of overdose, use illicit opioids, and contract infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C.⁴

Despite evidence of the effectiveness of treatment, fewer than one-quarter of publicly-funded treatment programs offer any of the FDA-approved medications, and only 1 in 4 Americans with an opioid use disorder receives any kind of care.⁵ Pew encourages states to invest in expanding access to all FDA-approved medications and behavioral health counseling to help reduce high rates of fatal opioid overdose.

As in any crisis, combatting the immediate threat to human life is the highest priority. Ensuring access to evidence-based treatment is vital for the roughly two million Americans who met criteria for an opioid use disorder in the past year.⁶

States are on the front lines of this battle. We urge Congress to continue its efforts to support states in expanding OUD treatment. Thank you for your continued dedication to addressing the nation's opioid crisis. Pew welcomes the opportunity to work with you to reduce the human toll related to the opioid crisis. Please do not hesitate to contact me at econnolly@pewtrusts.org or 202-540-6735 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Connolly
Director, Substance Use Prevention and Treatment Initiative

¹ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Tracking Federal Funding to Combat the Opioid Crisis," March 26, 2019, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/tracking-federal-funding-to-combat-the-opioid-crisis/>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths Continue to Rise; Increase Fueled by Synthetic Opioids," press release, March 29, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0329-drug-overdose-deaths.html>.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Drug Overdose Death Data," accessed September 4, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>.

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Medications for opioid use disorder save lives*, 2019, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, doi: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25310>.

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). Detailed Tables: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Table 7.63A (HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-detailed-tables>

⁶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP19-5068, NSDUH Series H-54). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-annual-national-report>.