

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Health Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo

Hearing on “An Epidemic within a Pandemic: Understanding Substance Use and Misuse in America”

April 14, 2021

According to recently reported data from the CDC, overdose deaths spiked after the start of the pandemic. From September 2019 through August 2020, there were over 88,000 overdose deaths, with 2020 being the deadliest year for overdoses on record. We’re in an addiction crisis amid the COVID-19 crisis.

In 2016 Congress passed the *21st Century Cures Act* and *CARA*, and the *SUPPORT Act* in 2018 to stem the tide of addiction and devastation that the opioid crisis has created. Congress also provided over \$8 billion to address opioid use and mental and behavioral healthcare through the American Rescue Plan and the FY 2021 Appropriations Act.

Yet, despite our legislative efforts to increase access to evidence-based treatment, according to a National Academies of Science report, more than 80 percent of the 2 million people with opioid use disorder are not receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment.

Today we will hear from Acting Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) about where and why previous efforts have fallen short, and what the Biden-Harris Administration believes we need to do to save lives.

We’ll also consider 11 bills, many bipartisan, to address the opioid crisis. According to the CDC, 3 in 5 people who died from overdose had an identified opportunity for care or other life-saving actions.

Representative Tonko and Trahan’s bipartisan bills will ensure more doctors are trained and able to prescribe the medication-assisted treatment that we know saves lives.

Those who are released from prisons and jail are 12 times more likely to die of an overdose than the general public because they often have no access to treatment upon release. The bipartisan *Medicaid Reentry Act* addresses these inequities by extending Medicaid eligibility to incarcerated individuals 30 days before release.

And lastly, we’re considering bills to address the upcoming expiration of the temporary placement of all fentanyl-related substances in Schedule 1. Despite the temporary scheduling, deaths from fentanyl analogues rose by 10%, so clearly scheduling is not the silver bullet and Congress has to consider alternatives to stop synthetic opioids.

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I yield the rest of my time to the sponsor of the *STOP Fentanyl Act of 2021*,
Representative Annie Kuster.