

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_,

My community is being ripped apart by addiction. Our state is laden with overdoses and suicides. Families should be planning graduation parties, not funerals! Children should be living with their parents – not their grandparents or in foster care because their parents have overdosed and died, or are suffering with untreated addiction. Why are people that do seek treatment being denied insurance coverage? Why aren't there enough recovery facilities that practice evidenced based care? My family, friends, and neighbors are overwhelmed by death, despair, and devastation. But the worst part is, we are losing hope.

My community, our state and this nation are in extreme crisis! We need a response from the Federal Government commensurate with the scope of this disastrous epidemic! Congress rightly voted to spend tens of billions of dollars in relief for communities ravaged by hurricanes and wildfires. Yet, EVERY DAY in this country, more people die from suicides and drug overdoses than the combined death toll of all of those natural disasters. Children are being left homeless and uncared for, to live 'in the system.' Don't be fooled—this ever rising opioid epidemic *IS* a national disaster. We need you to take action NOW!

You have to work with both your Republican and Democratic colleagues to introduce legislation that will greatly improve enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. Insurance plans are denying coverage for needed treatment, often disregarding the recommendations of attending providers and nationally-recognized treatment guidelines, in violation of the law. Addiction and mental illness are chronic diseases that require ongoing care. Evidence-based care, medications and supportive services are impossible without adequate insurance coverage.

You must act now to remove some of the horrific treatment limitations for mental health and addiction care within Medicaid and Medicare. The Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion in Medicaid and the 190-day limit on psychiatric inpatient care in Medicare have to be eliminated. Such restrictions don't exist for any other medical conditions, and these restrictions are literally killing us.

You must also do something to increase access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for people battling opioid addiction. Please work on legislation that allows providers to prescribe buprenorphine to more patients and eliminates insurance coverage barriers commonly used by health plans.

Most importantly, you have to work with your colleagues to appropriate a substantial and sustained level of federal funding to address this crisis. If this was any other disease killing so many Americans each day, Congress would have appropriated billions upon billions of dollars. I know there was one billion dollars in the 21st Century Cures Act last year to address the opioid epidemic, but that's just a drop in the bucket. The Cures funding is only for two years and it completely ignores the interrelated suicide crisis.

Our community needs more help from the Federal government in dealing with this national disaster. The Federal government must address this crisis like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) addresses other emergencies. We need immediate, necessary funding and a coordinated approach to resolution.

I urge you to refer to The Kennedy Forum's resource, [\*Navigating the New Frontier of Mental Health and Addiction: A Guide for the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress\*](#) for further guidance.

This non-partisan issue is inflicting unrelenting pain on our community and devastating Americans everywhere. I URGE YOU TO TAKE ACTION!

Sincerely,