

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### Opening Statement Chairman Elijah E. Cummings

#### **“Medical Experts: Inadequate Federal Approach to Opioid Treatment and the Need to Expand Care”**

June 19, 2019

Thank you very much for being here for this important hearing. We are honored to have some of our nation’s most accomplished medical experts and practitioners working on the front lines here to testify. Today, the Committee will be examining legislation that could significantly increase access to treatment across the country for those suffering from substance use disorder.

**Substance use disorder is a generational public health crisis—but most people suffering from it are not able to get the evidence-based treatment they need.**

More than 270,000 Americans died from drug overdoses from 2013 and 2017. Despite this staggering loss of life, a study based on the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that, of those who have substance use disorder, only “10.8 percent received specialty treatment.”

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine reported earlier this year that in 2016, just 36 percent of specialty treatment facilities offered any form of FDA-approved medication for opioid use disorder. It concluded: “only 6 percent of facilities offered all three medications” approved to treat the disease.

The National Academies also warned, “efforts to date have made no real headway in stemming this crisis, in large part because tools that already exist—like evidence-based medications—are not being deployed to maximum impact.”

**The response of the Administration and Congress has been woefully inadequate.**

For the entire first two years of the Trump Administration, the President failed to issue a National Drug Control Strategy, even though it was required by law. Finally, this past January, the Administration released its first Strategy, but it failed to meet even the most basic requirements of the law. Even more shocking, its stated goal is to reduce overdose deaths by only 15 percent over the next five years.

Let me put that into context. Even if the Trump Administration reaches its stated goal, more than 200,000 Americans will still die of overdoses by 2022.

Congress has also failed to act with the urgency this crisis demands. Last year, Congress passed the SUPPORT Act. Although that bill took small steps to expand treatment, it only nibbled at the edges of this generational health crisis. Meanwhile, nearly 200 Americans continue to die every single day during this epidemic.

**The CARE Act offers a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to getting people the treatment they need to save their lives. And it is endorsed by medical professionals across the country.**

The CARE Act is cosponsored by more than 100 Members of the House, including every single Democratic Member of this Committee. Even the Trump Administration's Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Jim Carroll, has commended the "heart and spirit" of this legislation.

The CARE Act would apply the proven model we adopted on a bipartisan basis to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It would authorize \$10 billion per year to provide states and local communities with stable funding to build a robust treatment infrastructure. It would expand access to medication-assisted treatment and wrap-around services. It would incentivize states to adopt model standards for treatment programs and recovery residences. And it would provide \$500 million per year to buy the overdose antidote naloxone and distribute it to first responders, public health offices, and the public.

The CARE Act has been endorsed by more than 200 organizations. For example:

- The American Medical Association has endorsed the CARE Act, noting: "The CARE Act is intended to fill the current funding gap and sets up a framework to do so."
- The American Society of Addiction Medicine supports the CARE Act because it will "help communities of all shapes and sizes provide critically needed and evidence-based addiction prevention, treatment, engagement, and recovery services."
- The American Psychological Association endorsed the CARE Act, noting: "The CARE Act acknowledges that a fundamental requirement for successfully addressing the drug overdose epidemic is treating the whole person."
- Finally, National Nurses United endorsed the CARE Act and wrote:

In order to effectively combat this horrible epidemic and save the lives of our patients, it is necessary for the members of this Committee, and the members of Congress in full, to commit to fully fund the response to the opioid crisis. We urge you to support and pass the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency Act of 2019, and look forward to working with you to do so.

I thank you all again for being here, and I look forward to your testimony.

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