

April 29, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Secretary Kennedy,

We, the undersigned organizations, are deeply concerned about the cuts to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs that address the nation's substance use disorder (SUD) crisis. This crisis has disrupted millions of lives and poses significant risks, including fatal overdose and related diseases such as HIV and hepatitis. We urge you to restore and preserve these critical programs, which are essential for improving public health and fighting SUD. Without HHS support for these initiatives, the country's continued commitment to ending SUD is in jeopardy.

Critical funding helps the United States overcome substance use disorder.

The substance use disorder crisis in the U.S. has had a profound effect on public health and has decreased U.S. life expectancy. From 2021-2023, more than 100,000 Americans died from overdoses annually, making it a leading cause of death among young adults. In 2023, more than 27 million Americans reported having a drug use disorder in the past year — a major contributor to overdose risk. This crisis has also increased the spread of infectious diseases — intravenous drug use contributed to more than 2.4 million hepatitis C cases and nearly 1 million HIV/AIDS cases.

Federal investments in substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery are saving lives. The latest CDC data shows a more than twenty-five percent decrease in drug overdose mortality from October 2023 to October 2024. Similarly, between 2012 and 2022, 27,900 new HIV transmissions were prevented, saving over an estimated \$15 billion in lifetime medical costs.

Cutting vital HHS programs hinders our ability to maintain Americans' health.

On March 18, 2025, you renewed the public health emergency declaration addressing our Nation's opioid crisis, signaling a continued commitment to combating the opioid overdose crisis and a critical step to Make America Healthy Again.

However, just days later, massive staff and program cuts were implemented at HHS, including at SAMHSA, CDC, and HRSA. These reductions hinder efforts to provide treatment, prevention, and recovery services, and threaten the progress made in reducing overdose deaths.

HHS programs and services address more than direct provision of treatment services. HHS' public health surveillance of the illicit drug supply, drug use patterns, and non-fatal overdoses provide states with the necessary intelligence to address overdose hot spots and deploy effective point-in-time services. They also help identify and address gaps in a rapidly declining health care and behavioral health care workforce at a time when more than one-third of Americans live in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area. Many states rely heavily on federal support for HIV prevention, and cuts in funding will reverse decades of progress in preventing HIV, viral hepatitis, STIs, and tuberculosis.

Substance use disorder has broad, adverse societal effects.

The impact of SUD extends far beyond individuals, affecting families, communities, and the economy. The nation's economy and health care system have borne steep social costs from untreated SUD, including lost productivity and increased health care expenses.

Addressing substance use disorder and infectious disease improves health in the United States because it directly saves lives, reduces the burden on the health care system, decreases the spread of infectious diseases, and creates opportunities for treatment and recovery. Moreover, a healthy America, where people provide for their families and play an active role in their community and the workforce, is essential to a robust and resilient economy and society.

HHS can end substance use disorder and overdose in the U.S.

Overdose deaths have declined due to increased access to treatment with nearly 13 million Americans receiving care for SUD in 2023, and more than 20 million Americans have found recovery from substance or alcohol use disorders. Further cuts to these essential programs may undo this progress. We urge you to reinstate the vital programs at HHS to ensure that the U.S. continues its progress in ending SUD and overdose deaths.

We, the undersigned, share your goal of making America healthy. Continued progress toward reducing the toll of substance use is critical to that goal.

Sincerely,

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina
Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People (ARRWIP)
AIDS United
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (AAPP)
American College of Correctional Physicians
AMERSA

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)
California Consortium of Addiction Programs & Professionals
CASES
Coai, Inc.
Community Catalyst
Community Oriented Correctional Health Services
Dream.Org
Drug Policy Alliance
Faces & Voices of Recovery
Friends Outside
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality
IC&RC
Legal Action Center
MY Brother's Keeper, Inc.
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NASTAD
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Behavioral Health Association of Providers
National Commission on Correctional Health Care
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Safety Council
New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.
Overdose Prevention Initiative
PA Harm Reduction Network
Partnership to End Addiction
Pennsylvania Harm Reduction Network
PRC
Princeton Overdose Prevention
TASC, Inc. (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities)
The AIDS Institute
Treatment Communities of America
Waves Ahead Corp