

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 18, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer:

As you continue negotiations for the next coronavirus package, we urge you include robust funding for substance use disorder and mental health care. Robust supplemental funding will help address the substance use disorder crisis that has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. With such funding, individuals will be better supported to begin and sustain recovery, and family members will be better equipped to find help for their loved one and psychosocial support for themselves.

In July, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released preliminary data indicating that drug overdose fatalities were at a record high in 2019 with 70,980 deaths. Trends also indicate that in addition to the use of opioids, the use of stimulants including methamphetamine and cocaine is increasing in areas across the country. Worse still, as the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified, drug overdoses have nearly doubled. Compared to the same month in 2019, overdoses have progressively increased by 18% in March, 29% in April and 42% in May.

The combination of social distancing, increased financial stress, loss of work, lack of structured time, and uncertainty about the future — coupled with disruption to traditional and local care services — has created a perfect storm for mental health and addiction struggles and a pressing need for increased funding for treatment and support services. Meanwhile, mental health and addiction providers and organizations are in an economic crisis and in jeopardy of failing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In New York alone, one in three community behavioral health organizations expects to close their doors within the next six months because of the financial uncertainty originating from the pandemic. If these organizations fail, millions of people living with mental illness or addiction will flood health centers, urgent care facilities and emergency departments, all of which are already over-burdened.

The mental health and addiction field needs emergency funding in the next legislative package to combat the economic and health care effects of COVID-19, maintain operations and ensure stability for the duration of the crisis. Advocates including the National Council continue to urge for the allocation of nearly \$40 billion in emergency funds for providers of mental health and addiction treatment services.

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Your inclusion in the final negotiated package of robust to support substance use disorder and mental health services, will give necessary resources for vulnerable individuals, their families, and their communities.

Our country's substance use disorder and mental health crises have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the wake of increased isolation and anxiety coupled with treatment and support system disruptions, the number of people suffering, relapsing, and dying from substance abuse disorders is increasing. Now, more than ever, those with mental health and addiction struggles and the caregivers looking to help them need our help. Thank you for recognizing this need and responding in kind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kirsten" and last name "Gillibrand" clearly legible.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator