

President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Sent electronically

May 26, 2021

Dear President Biden:

Thank you for your administration's tireless efforts to save lives during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. While the undersigned organizations sincerely appreciate and understand that focus, we are very concerned that a nominee for director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) remains unnamed.

Drug overdoses continue to be a national epidemic with more than 88,000 overdose deaths in the 12-month period to August 2020.¹ This is the highest rate ever recorded. The increase is largely due to the presence of fentanyl, but overdose deaths involving cocaine and psychostimulants, such as methamphetamine, have also increased dramatically. Overdose deaths involving psychostimulants increased nearly five-fold between 2012 and 2018² and again by 34.8% from the 12-months ending in June 2019 compared with the 12 months ending in May 2020.³ Alcohol consumption also increased 17% between 2019 and 2020.⁴

While this acceleration of substance use and overdose deaths during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency reflects a combination of treatment disruptions, social isolation, and other hardships that the pandemic has imposed, it is not entirely clear how these increases relate to the changing landscape of availability of addiction prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services. We do know, however, that the pandemic likely only exacerbated what was already a wholly inadequate level of treatment for people with a substance use disorder (SUD) in this country. More than 21 million Americans aged 12 or older needed treatment for SUD in 2019, but only about 4.2 million Americans received any form of treatment for it.⁵

An all-hands-on-deck approach is required to explore outstanding questions and implement solutions. This requires a fully functioning ONDCP. ONDCP is the federal office responsible for

¹ Ahmad FB, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. 2021.

² Hedegaard H, Miniño AM, Warner M. [Working Draft – Not for Distribution \(hhs.gov\)](#). NCHS Data Brief, no 356. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2020.

³ CDC. Increase in Fatal Drug Overdoses Across the United States Driven by Synthetic Opioids Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. December 17, 2020. CDCHAN-00438. [HAN Archive - 00438 | Health Alert Network \(HAN\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

⁴ Pollard, MS, Tucker, JS, Green HD. Changes in Adult Alcohol Use and Consequences During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the US. JAMA Network Open. 2020;3(9): e2022942. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.22942

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2020). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP20-07-01-001, NSDUH Series H-55). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

leading and coordinating the nation's drug policy so that it improves the health and lives of the American people. The Biden-Harris administration's Statement of Drug Policy Priorities for Year One was a concise and focused document that clearly identified issues that need addressing. An ONDCP director is now needed to implement, and build upon, those priorities for a nation that continues to be devastated by the preventable and treatable disease of addiction and drug overdoses.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that you prioritize the appointment of an ONDCP director. We are eager to work with you, the next ONDCP director, and your entire administration to save lives.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina
AIDS United
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence
American College of Emergency Physicians
Americans for Prosperity
American Psychiatric Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Behavioral Health Association of Providers
Hon. Mary Bono, Former Member of Congress
Michael Botticelli, former Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy
CADA of Northwest Louisiana
California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals
James Carroll, former Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
Robert L. DuPont, M.D., former Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy
Faces and Voices of Recovery
Gil Kerlikowske, former Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy
Legal Action Center
Live4Lali
Mothers Against Prescription Drug Abuse
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children of Addiction
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Athletic Trainers' Association
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Safety Council
Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing
SAFEProject
Ronald W. Serpas, Ph.D., (Ret) Superintendent, New Orleans Police Department and Executive Director, Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration
Smart Approaches to Marijuana

SMART Recovery
The American Osteopathic Academy of Addiction Medicine
Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities
Treatment Communities of America
Verde Environmental Technologies, Inc.
WestCare Foundation
Young People In Recovery