



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 22, 2020

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ASAM Applauds Inclusion of Addiction-Related Provisions in End-of-Year Congressional Spending Deal

ASAM commends Congress for policies that will strengthen the addiction treatment workforce and parity in mental health and substance use disorder benefits; ASAM continues to call for future, strategic investments and bolder policy changes to transform America's addiction treatment workforce and infrastructure

Rockville, MD – Today the [American Society of Addiction Medicine](https://www.asam.org/) (ASAM) commended Congress for yesterday's passage of several important addiction-related provisions in its bipartisan, end-of-year spending package that will increase Americans' access to addiction treatment.

"We applaud Congress for its bipartisan effort to enact policies that will strengthen the addiction treatment workforce and parity in mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) benefits in this country," said Paul H. Earley, MD, DFASAM, president of ASAM.

Once enacted, the bill will support the delivery of addiction medicine services by:

- Appropriating \$16 million for FY 2021 – a \$4 million increase over the FY 2020 level - for the Loan Repayment Program for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce, which addresses workforce shortages by providing for the repayment of education loans for individuals working in full-time addiction treatment jobs that involve direct patient care in either a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area or a county where the overdose death rate exceeds the national average;
- Appropriating \$29.7 million for FY 2021 – a \$3 million increase over the FY 2020 level - for the Mental and Substance Use Disorder Workforce Training Demonstration program, which is designed to make grants to institutions to support training for medical fellows in addiction psychiatry and addiction medicine, as well as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and others, to provide addiction treatment in underserved communities;
- Requiring (1) group health plans and health insurance issuers offering coverage in the individual or group markets to conduct comparative analyses of the nonquantitative treatment limitations

used for medical and surgical benefits as compared to mental health and SUD benefits; (2) requests for comparative analyses of at least 20 plans per year that involve potential violations of mental health parity and complaints regarding noncompliance with mental health parity, and (3) the publication of an annual report with a summary of the comparative analyses; and

- Including 1,000 new Medicare-supported GME positions – the first increase in nearly 25 years. Slots will be prioritized for training programs in rural areas, hospitals training residents over their cap, states with new medical schools, and providers that care for underserved communities in the distribution of these new residency positions. These new positions may help support addiction medicine fellowships and prerequisite programs.

Finally, the end-of-year package appropriates billions of dollars to various Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) mental health and addiction treatment programs to help ensure continued access to addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery support services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the addiction and overdose crisis is getting worse,” Dr. Earley continued. “A record number of Americans lost their lives in the 12-month period ending May 2020 due to drug overdose. The next Congress must make strategic investments and bolder policy changes that will continue to strengthen America’s addiction treatment workforce and build an evidence-based, addiction prevention and treatment infrastructure. For starters, next steps should include the permanent elimination of the DATA 2000 x-waiver to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder and ensuring DEA controlled medication prescribers have a baseline knowledge of how to assess and treat patients with addiction.”

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About the American Society of Addiction Medicine

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), founded in 1954, is a professional medical society representing over 6,600 physicians, clinicians and associated professionals in the field of addiction medicine. ASAM is dedicated to increasing access and improving the quality of addiction treatment, educating physicians and the public, supporting research and prevention and promoting the appropriate role of physicians in the care of patients with addiction. For more information, visit www.ASAM.org.