



**ASAM** American Society of  
Addiction Medicine

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## **ASAM President Testifies Before Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Opioid Overdose Epidemic**

*Dr. Kelly J. Clark Called on Congress to Strengthen the Addiction Treatment Workforce, Improve Access to Evidence-Based Addiction Treatment*

**Rockville, MD** – Testifying today before the U.S. House of Representatives Bipartisan Heroin and Opioid Task Force, American Society of Addiction (ASAM) President Kelly J. Clark, MD, MBA, DFAPA, DFASAM, urged lawmakers to make strategic investments in the substance use disorder (SUD) treatment workforce in order to close the addiction treatment gap and ensure the millions of Americans living with SUD are able to receive the care they need.

“Following the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and last year’s historic opioid legislation – the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (H.R. 6) – in which Congress recognized the need to incentivize more professionals to join the SUD treatment workforce, critical funding is needed now to build an adequate workforce of well-trained clinicians in communities across America,” said Dr. Clark.

Despite the dire need, there are too few physicians and other clinicians with the requisite knowledge and training to prevent, diagnose, and treat addiction. According to the [latest estimates](#), 21 million Americans needed treatment for SUD in 2017, but only 4 million received any form of treatment.

Among other important provisions designed to teach, standardize and cover addiction medicine, H.R. 6 authorized \$25 million in funding to create a student loan repayment program for individuals who commit to working in one of the country’s many Mental Health Professional Service Areas (MHPSA) for at least six years. Furthermore, in 2016, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act authorized \$10 million to support training for medical residents and fellows as well as physician assistants, health service psychologists and social workers who provide SUD treatment in underserved areas, but the program has never been funded. It is necessary that Congress fully fund these programs to increase the ranks of qualified, well-trained treatment professionals in high-need communities across America.

During her testimony, Dr. Clark also encouraged lawmakers to pass legislation that would standardize the delivery of addiction treatment by facilitating the use of nationally-recognized, expert treatment guidelines and standards and ensure broader access to medications for the treatment of opioid use disorder. Specifically, Dr. Clark urged Congress to pass legislation to:

- Incentivize states to adopt standards for the licensure of addiction treatment programs meeting level-of-care standards defined by The ASAM Criteria;
- Provide people with opioid addiction during periods of their incarceration access to all FDA-approved medications for the treatment of addiction and the infectious diseases associated with it, as well as warm handoffs to community-based care upon the release of incarcerated persons with a substance use disorder;
- Align 42 CFR Part 2 with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) within the healthcare system to better coordinate care for individuals with SUD while leaving in place federal prohibitions on the disclosure of records outside the healthcare system; and
- Grant the Department of Labor additional enforcement authority to address ongoing violations across the country of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

“Stigma, misunderstanding, an inadequate clinical workforce, lack of patient access to baseline standards of care, continued funding of care that doesn’t work – these are issues our country can address,” Dr. Clark concluded. “They demand we harness the full strength of federal authority and resources. Whether we rise to meet this historic challenge is a decision that rests largely in Congressional hands.”

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### **About ASAM**

The American Society of Addiction Medicine, founded in 1954, is a professional society representing over 5,000 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](http://www.ASAM.org).