



ASAM American Society of
Addiction Medicine

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ASAM Commends Bipartisan, Bicameral Congressional Request for Next COVID-19 Relief Package to Include Emergency Aid for Addiction Treatment Providers

In a letter to House and Senate leadership, the lawmakers called for at least \$38.5 billion in COVID-19 emergency aid for behavioral health organizations

Rockville, MD – The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) commends the bipartisan, bicameral group of Congressional members [who yesterday sent a letter urging](#) House and Senate leadership to provide emergency funding to organizations that primarily treat individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders (collectively, behavioral health organizations or “BHOs”) across the United States as part of ongoing efforts to mitigate the health and economic effects of COVID-19.

The letter, addressed to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY), Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), calls for significant and immediate relief for BHOs that provide treatment to millions of Americans with mental health and substance use disorders and are now at risk of closing down as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 national emergency.

Specifically, the lawmakers call for at least \$38.5 billion in emergency aid for BHOs that utilize evidence-based practices and can meet at least one of the following three criteria: 1) accredited by an independent, national accrediting organization; 2) receive state or tribal funding; or 3) qualify as community mental health centers as defined in Section 1913(c) of the Public Health Service Act. This critically needed funding would provide immediate, short-term relief to BHOs who are at high risk of closing their doors, jeopardizing states’ disaster responses, as well as patient safety. The baseline level of funding the lawmakers requested is an essential step towards maintaining the country’s addiction treatment infrastructure but only buys time as the

crisis mounts for those who have lost access to treatment as a result of societal restrictions in place to stop the spread of the virus.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on millions of Americans living with addiction, a chronic disease that is exacerbated by isolation, anxiety and economic distress,” said Paul H. Earley, MD, DFASAM, president of ASAM. “Our patients are in crisis and they need help now. We applaud these members of Congress for recognizing the urgency of the situation and call on leaders from both parties to act swiftly and prioritize emergency funding that will save lives.”

“Congress has passed four stimulus packages to bolster the nation’s response to COVID-19. However, none have addressed the growing challenge to and need for BHOs,” the lawmakers wrote. “With a growing number of Americans in need of behavioral health services and many BHOs at risk of closing, the nation is headed towards another public health crisis...[W]e must pass a stimulus package that prioritizes the financial security of these vital health care providers and the health of millions of Americans.”

A recent Kaiser Family Foundation [poll](#) found that the pandemic and its resultant social and economic impacts are already taking a heavy toll on Americans’ mental health. Forty-five percent of respondents reported that the pandemic is negatively affecting their mental health, up from thirty-two percent just a month prior. [Anecdotal reports](#) have indicated that rates of consumption of alcohol and other addictive substances are on the rise. Furthermore, social distancing measures have created barriers to accessing treatment, which has only been exacerbated by a scarcity of available providers as they either fall ill or become overloaded with patients. According to the latest [government estimates](#), more than 20 million Americans live with substance use disorder, including 2 million who have opioid use disorder.

“This is a crisis within a pandemic, and we must take action so that vulnerable individuals who were in need of treatment prior to the pandemic continue to receive it during this public health emergency,” said Earley. “This emergency funding will provide a reprieve from potential collapse of the addiction and mental health treatment infrastructure and most certainly save lives.”

The lawmakers who signed the letter include Representative John Katko (R-NY), Representative Paul D. Tonko (D-NY), Representative Doris Matsui (D-CA), Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA), Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Senator Christopher S. Murphy (D-CT), and Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), among others.

About the American Society of Addiction Medicine

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), founded in 1954, is a professional medical society representing over 6,000 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.

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