

STATEMENT OF  
REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN FITZPATRICK OF PENNSYLVANIA'S EIGHTH DISTRICT  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,  
EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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I would like to thank Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro and other members of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies for holding this hearing. As this subcommittee develops appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I strongly encourage the full funding for opioid epidemic related programs and cancer research programs. This includes provisions of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), NIH innovation projects and state responses to opioid abuse in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act, and funding the National Institutes of Health.<sup>1,2</sup>

Prescription opioid misuse continues to devastate Americans nationwide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdoses involving prescription opioids and heroin have quadrupled since 1999. The opioid epidemic continues to claim lives from each of our districts. From Levittown to Lower Salford, no part of my district is left unaffected. Last year in Bucks County, opioid related deaths rose by 50 percent.<sup>3</sup> In neighboring Montgomery County, opioid overdoses claimed a staggering 240 lives – up 36 percent from the previous year.

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<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, [Public Law No. 114-198](#), July 22, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act, [Public Law No. 114-255](#), December 13, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Bucks County Courier Times, [Chilling Record: Opioid Fatalities](#), January 31, 2017.

At the same time, however, law enforcement officials and first responders have tirelessly worked to save lives. Diane Rosati of the Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission recently reported that Bucks County police departments have saved over 263 residents through naloxone, an opioid overdose emergency treatment nasal spray. “While the number of lives saved from accidental overdose is an amazing number, Ms. Rosati added, “it speaks to the magnitude of the issue and need for treatment follow through.”

Thoughtfully designed, CARA utilizes a balanced strategy encompassing six pillars: prevention, treatment, recovery support, criminal justice reform, overdose reversal, and law enforcement. Within the jurisdiction of this subcommittee, authorized funding by CARA for HHS include grants that will significantly aid states with much needed resources and tools. Grant funding will (to name a few):

- reduce the number of opioid related deaths by (a) assisting states in expanding access to opioid overdose reversal drugs like naloxone, and (b) educating health care professionals by developing or providing training manuals and developing new strategies for pharmacists to dispense opioid overdose reversal medication (pursuant to standing order).
- reduce relapses and help fully recover patients by (a) expanding the availability of evidence-based medication assisted treatment and other clinical appropriate services to areas with high rates or rapid increases in heroin or opioid abuse; and (b) through building connections between recovery community organizations that will strengthen outreach, reduce the substance abuse disorder stigma; and

- reduce substance abuse cases in pregnant and postpartum women by developing a pilot program that will better support family-based services, identify gaps along continuum of care, and encouraging new approaches for service delivery.

In addition to CARA, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act also contained funding to combat the opioid epidemic. Specifically, the remaining \$500 million would supplement opioid abuse prevention and treatment activities by providing funding for states to improve prescription drug monitoring programs, implement prevention activities, train healthcare providers, and expand access to treatment programs.

Second, I would like to bring to the subcommittee's attention to the importance of funding the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH has served a pivotal role in basic cancer research and its success is evident in treatments we see today. More remarkably, in 1991, an NIH partnership with a then small company called Genzyme would lead to the development of one of the first orphan drugs, Ceredase (now Cerezyme) to treat a rare disease affecting an estimated 10,000 people worldwide.<sup>4,5</sup> Today, the US boasts in housing the best innovators in biology and medicine research, producing groundbreaking drugs and more research publications than any other country.<sup>6</sup>

In consideration of time, I would like to mention funding for the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). NIDDK conducts research on many of the most common, costly, and chronic conditions. This includes diabetes, digestive diseases, and liver disease (to name a few). In my district, I had the privilege of meeting with research

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<sup>4</sup> The Pharma Letter, [Cerezyme Approved in USA](#), June 6, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> The Washington Post, [The High Cost of Rare Diseases: When Patients Can't Afford to Buy Lifesaving Drugs](#), By Larry Thompson, June 25, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, [The Most Innovative Countries in Biology and Medicine](#), By Matthew Herper, March 23, 2011. Whitman, Glen and Raymond Raad. [Bending the Productivity Curve: Why America Leads the World in Medical Innovation](#). November 18, 2009. Cato Institute.

scientists at the Baruch S. Blumberg Institute, one of the leading global labs focused on Hepatitis B (HBV) research. Dr. Tim Block and his team discussed the significance of this disease and the need for continued research. While HBV is preventable through vaccination, an estimated 2.2 million Americans live with this life-threatening disease. HBV has been on the rise in recent years, and in some studies, the rise was linked to drug abuse.<sup>7, 8, 9, 10</sup> Eventually, in most cases, HBV will lead to liver cirrhosis or liver cancer. The patient will then need a liver transplant which is dependent on donor availability and if they are an eligible candidate. The procedure is a large financial undertaking. Including physician costs, anti-rejection antibiotics and pain drugs, rehabilitation, follow-up care, and testing, the final bill can exceed \$500,000.<sup>11</sup>

The costs of current treatment methods for HBV are by far higher when compared to a drug that cures. Hepatitis C, for example, is curable.<sup>12, 13, 14, 15</sup> When compared to its

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<sup>7</sup> US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Increases in Acute Hepatitis B Virus Infections — Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia, 2006–2013](#), By Aaron M. Harris, Kashif Iqbal, Sarah Schillie, James Britton, Marion Kainer, Stacy Tressler, and Claudia Vellozzi, January 29, 2016, *Weekly* 65(3): 47-50.

<sup>8</sup> Portland Herald Press, [Fueled by Heroin Crisis, Hepatitis B Cases Rise in Maine](#), by Joe Lawlor, September 5, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Kris Kowdley, Chia Wang, Sue Welch, Henry Roberts, and Carol Brosgart, [Prevalence of chronic Hepatitis B Among Foreign-Born Persons Living in the United States by Country of Origin](#), *Hepatology* 56, no. 2 (2012): 422-433.

<sup>10</sup> Ashley Simmons, [The Epidemiology of Hepatitis B in West Virginia](#), Prepared for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services, November 19, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> United Network for Organ Sharing, [Financing a Transplant: The Costs](#), 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Evangelos Cholongitas and George Papatheodoridis, [Sofosbuvir: A Novel Oral Agent for Chronic Hepatitis C](#), 2014, *Annals of Gastroenterology*, 27(4): 331-337.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Smith, et. al, [Ledipasvir-Sofosbuvir Interferon-/Ribavirin-Free Regimen for Chronic Hepatitis C Virus Infection](#), March 2015, *Week 14*, 49(3): 343-350.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Lam, et. al, [Sofosbuvir \(Sovaldi\) for the Treatment of Hepatitis C](#), June 2014, *Expert Review of Clinical Pharmacology*, 7(5): 555-566.

<sup>15</sup> Sean McConachie, et. al, [New direct-acting antivirals in hepatitis C therapy: a review of sofosbuvir, ledipasvir, daclatasvir, simeprevir, paritaprevir, ombitasvir and dasabuvir](#), January 2016, *Expert Review of Clinical Pharmacology*, 9(2): 287-302.

contemporaries and predecessors, Sovaldi is the least burdensome option when considering its efficacy, length of therapy, side effects, and cost.

The social and financial burden of diseases like HBV do not only impact patients and their loved ones, but the economic effect of low efficacy treatments is burdensome to government. Medicare, which is expected to become insolvent by 2028, is the largest single payer for liver transplants, averaging at \$188,000 across Parts A and B.<sup>16, 17</sup> Observing national expenditures, the United Network for Organ Sharing has estimated that the cost of care for each year's cohort is about \$5.6 billion.<sup>18</sup>

Investing in medical research and combating the opioid epidemic are two very significant agendas HHS should focus on. As a member of the Congressional Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus and the Bipartisan Heroin Task Force, I strongly urge this subcommittee to fully fund opioid related activities through CARA and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures. I also ask that full funding be appropriated to NIH as the institutes will continue to serve a vital role in treating, preventing, and curing diseases. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Service, [Medicare: Insolvency Projections](#), By Patricia Davis, October 5, 2016

<sup>17</sup> Health Resources & Services Administration, [OPTN/SRTR 2012 Annual Data Report: Liver](#), 2012, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Modern Healthcare, [Transplant Providers Dispute Changes to Allocating Donated Livers](#), By Sabriya Rice, September 20, 2014.