

Ranking Member H. Morgan Griffith
Oversight and Investigations Hearing
““Americans in Need: Responding to the
National Mental Health Crisis”
February 17, 2022
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair DeGette, for holding this hearing.

This hearing comes at a critical time. Dealing with the pandemic these last two years has taken a significant toll on many people, resulting in troubling increases in levels of mental health issues in the United States.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Health Interview Survey show American adults are reporting significantly elevated levels of adverse mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression, as well as increased substance use

and suicidal ideations.¹ A growing number of scientific studies also indicate concerning trends with respect to our nation's mental health, and tend to show that different populations are affected in different ways.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our nation's mental health and well-being, exacerbating and creating increased levels of anxiety and depression for many Americans. And it's no wonder, as we have faced significant hardships during the pandemic—individual experiences of severe or long-lasting COVID-19 cases, loss of loved ones to the virus, high levels of on-the-job stress and trauma for front-line and essential workers, job loss

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020 (Aug. 14, 2020), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>.

and economic uncertainty for families, and school closures inhibiting both academic and social development.

Just last week, the U.S. Surgeon General testified that the pandemic has had a “devastating” impact on the mental health of America’s young people.² School closures, and lockdowns in particular, have been associated with adverse mental health symptoms. It is important for us to remember that school is not just where our children are taught reading and math and science. It is also where kids socialize, where many find reliable access to meals, and where there are opportunities to interact with counselors and other trusted adults.

² Kelly Livingston, *Pandemic’s impact on youth mental health ‘devastating’*: Surgeon General, ABC NEWS (Feb. 8, 2022), available at https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/pandemics-impact-youth-mental-health-devastating-surgeon-general/story?id=82749265&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top.

Americans deserve a comprehensive approach to public health that balances COVID-19 mitigation efforts with other considerations. While it may have been wise to implement certain policies at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of them have been unnecessarily prolonged. Of course, we want to prevent as many deaths from COVID-19 as possible. But a death by suicide is just as devastating. We must consider mental health as we evaluate the impact of current policies, and as we develop policies for the future.

In addition to concerns about the impact of the pandemic on youth mental health, the Surgeon General noted problems with access to care.³ During the COVID-19

³ *Id.*

pandemic, demand for mental health services increased substantially, and providers have reported difficulty meeting demand.⁴ This is an area we need to work to address to ensure that individuals have sufficient access to any care that they need.

The pandemic and the government's response to COVID-19 has also been a factor in the staggering increase in overdose deaths. Provisional data from the CDC indicate that there were an estimated 103,306 overdose deaths in the U.S. during the 12-month period ending in April 2021 – an increase of nearly 30 percent from the

⁴ https://www.axios.com/covid-pandemic-mental-health-neuroflow-e6d92b6a-7a06-43f7-ac43-cc750c07f8e5.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top.

number of deaths reported in the same period the year before.⁵

We know that mental health and substance use disorders often overlap and are co-occurring. Multiple national surveys have found that about half of those who experience a mental illness during their lives will also experience a substance use disorder, and vice versa.⁶ Thus, it is critical that in addition to addressing our nation's mental health, we also examine how to best address the increase of substance use disorders and overdose deaths throughout the U.S.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Drug Overdose Deaths in the U.S. Top 100,000 Annually (Nov. 17, 2021), *available at* https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20211117.htm.

⁶ National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Common Comorbidities with Substance Use Disorders Research Report, Part 1: The Connection Between Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illness* (Apr. 2020), *available at* <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/part-1-connection-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illness>.

The mental health of our nation has been and will continue to be a top priority of this committee. I look forward to today's discussion and to learning more about how best to address the mental health needs of our nation. I thank the witnesses for being here today and being part of this important conversation. I yield back.