

**Statement for the Record Submitted by
Charles Ingoglia, President and CEO, National Council for Behavioral Health
Hearing of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
“An Epidemic within a Pandemic: Understanding Substance Use and Misuse in America”
Wednesday, April 14, 2021**

The National Council for Behavioral Health (National Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the hearing entitled, “An Epidemic within a Pandemic: Understanding Substance Use and Misuse in America.” National Council is the unifying voice for nearly 3,500 mental health and substance use disorder organizations serving over 10 million adults, children, and families living with serious mental illness and addictions. National Council applauds the Committee for holding this hearing to consider policy solutions aimed at reversing the growing substance use and overdose trends that have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the mental wellbeing of Americans.

The legislation being considered today will increase access to life-saving medications such as buprenorphine and create a necessary bridge in Medicaid coverage for those reentering society from the criminal justice system. These legislative proposals would also help prevent unnecessary prescribing of opioid medications, and ensure states and localities are able to meet the needs of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the overdose crises related to opioids. Overall, the legislation being considered today will strengthen integrated and coordinated care efforts for people who have mental health and substance use disorder needs, improve our mental health and substance use workforce, and move our care systems toward parity.

While the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Americans’ mental health will be long-standing, we can already see alarming trends. Increased isolation and job loss have resulted in staggering increases in both non-fatal and fatal overdoses and increased demand for services provided by mental health and substance use disorder treatment organizations. New research found that one-third of COVID-19 survivors developed a mental health condition they had not previously had.¹ In 2019, 11 percent of Americans identified as having anxiety and/or depression. In January 2021, that number had risen to 41 percent.²

The devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue to worsen as the full public health impact comes into focus. We must act swiftly to save American lives. We applaud the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health for its commitment to addressing the growing addiction crisis and for its thoughtful discussion about the legislation being considered today. National Council thanks the Subcommittee for its unwavering dedication to meaningful, evidence-based solutions to the ongoing substance use and overdose crises and strongly supports policies that provide more integrated care, increase the mental health and substance use disorder workforce, and promote parity.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(21\)00084-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(21)00084-5/fulltext)

² <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>