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House Committee on Oversight and Reform  
(The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Chairman)

*"Medical Experts: Inadequate Federal Approach to Opioid Treatment  
and the Need to Expand Care"*

Testimony Submitted for the Hearing Record

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, it is an honor to present this written testimony for today's important hearing.

SMART Recovery is a 25-year-old global network of well over 3,000 mutual support groups – including 2,000 in the U.S. – that help individuals overcome any addiction and families and friends care for loved ones with addictions. We are a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization composed almost entirely of volunteers. SMART, which stands for Self-Management And Recovery Training, provides this help at free weekly meetings using a self-empowering, evidence-based program using principles and practices from the cognitive and motivational therapies most widely used in treatment. We are helping the fast-growing number of people with opioid use disorder; SMART meetings provide stigma-free support to those undergoing Medication-assisted treatment. Due to our scientific orientation, SMART has always accepted the use of medications prescribed to treat mental health conditions and to support addiction recovery.

The addiction crisis and particularly the opioid epidemic – even with billions of dollars in appropriations and passage of well-intentioned authorizing legislation – is years away from being resolved. Drug overdoses alone in 2017 took 70,000 lives – two-thirds of them from opioids.

The many causes of the addiction crisis (including the opioid crisis) have created for the foreseeable future a grisly new normal in the many people in need of help, including the more than 20 million Americans suffering from substance use disorders and the family members and friends trying to care for them.

Working on the front lines to help those most affected by this epidemic, joined by the treatment providers with whom we collaborate, we believe that the Federal government's response to the opioid epidemic has been woefully inadequate. The funding levels are well below what is needed. We are not giving nearly enough attention to ensure that everyone in need receives the best care, including ready access to needed medications, high-quality behavioral healthcare, and ongoing peer support and mutual aid meetings *that expressly endorse* (rather than work at cross-purposes with) Medication-assisted treatment and mental health therapies.

Mr. Chairman, this is one reason that SMART Recovery strongly supports your bill, H.R. 2569, the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency Act of 2019 (commonly known as the CARE Act), as well as its Senate companion, S. 1365, introduced by Senator Warren. We believe that passage of H.R. 2569 this Congress, whatever its fate in the other body in the short term, will show everyone suffering from substance use disorders, and especially opioid use disorder, that the people's House is serious about attacking aggressively the most serious U.S. public health crisis in recent memory.

Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for Mental Health and Substance Use, who also served in the second term of the Obama administration, has stated on several occasions that “Medication-assisted treatment combined with psychosocial therapies and community-based recovery support is the gold standard for treating opioid addiction.” Other experts and commentators worldwide have used virtually the identical language.

SMART Recovery is the largest community-based recovery support program that expressly and affirmatively supports Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and mental healthcare. Better known support programs have not expressed support, and people undergoing such treatment cannot find the help they need at many meetings.

When the language of H.R. 2569 is next visited, we respectfully recommend that language be added so that the units of government awarded grants – in addition to agreeing to make Medication-assisted treatment widely available, and for treatment providers receiving CARE Act funds to be held accountable for providing quality care, and fulfill the bill’s other requirements – also ensure that provision is made for pro-MAT, pro-mental healthcare support meetings. All too often the only peer support in many communities are meetings whose attendees are told that MAT in particular is “a poor choice,” that prescribers are misguided, and that meeting attendees on MAT cannot participate. That means that the critical third component of the gold standard of care is not available in a form that works with the best medical and therapeutic protocols. The failure to provide this component increases the risk of relapse (an all-too-common aspect of substance use disorders as it is), which results in still higher cost care. The budgetary outlays required to address the opioid crisis, and your estimate, Mr. Chairman, is the \$100 billion authorized by the CARE Act, would be even higher if grant recipients were not required to

ensure that peer support works synergistically with Medication-assisted treatment and behavioral health therapies.

As you know, under present grant programs, grant recipients can use some of their funds to foster the develop of such meetings. Thus far, only the State of Connecticut has done so, with a \$200,000 increment of one its grants under the State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis program, but there is no requirement that grant recipients do so. As a result, appropriated funds under existing law are less effective than they would otherwise be. And without such additional language, the CARE Act would be less successful in attacking the opioid epidemic that it would otherwise be.

It is crucial that all three aspects of the gold standard – Medication-assisted treatment, psychosocial therapies and community support – not only all be readily available to all who are suffering from opioid use disorder but that they all work together to help the patient. Too much is at stake for that not to be the case.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony. At SMART Recovery we stand ready to help you address this crisis in every way we can.