



August 22, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations—representing a wide range of behavioral health practitioners—we urge you to include robust funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), and specifically funding for the Mental Health Care Provider Education in HIV/AIDS Program, in the FY 2018 Labor-HHS-Education spending bill.

Despite life-saving medical advances, HIV remains a serious public health epidemic across the country. There are significant challenges involving AIDS prevention and treatment for the estimated 1.2 million people in the U.S. living with HIV¹. **Notably, among these individuals, behavioral health co-morbidities are common and often disregarded.** Individuals living with a serious mental illness are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors and are at significantly greater risk of contracting or transmitting an HIV infection. Furthermore, adults with mental health disorders are significantly more likely to use prescription opioids²; those who inject their medication face a heightened risk of transmitting HIV and Hepatitis C.³

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). *Today's HIV/AIDS Epidemic* [Fact Sheet] Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/.../docs/factsheets/todaysepidemic-508.pdf>

² Davis, Matthew A. et. al. (2017). Prescription Opioid Use among Adults with Mental Health Disorders in the United States. *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, 30;4, 407-417.

³ AmfAR. (2017) Opioid and Health Indicators Database. Online at <http://opioid.amfar.org/>

Unfortunately, the co-existence of mental health disorders and HIV-positive status is frequently associated with barriers to access, reduced retention in care, disease progression, compromised adherence to antiretroviral treatment, and worsening health outcomes, all of which make the clinical goal of viral suppression less attainable.

Mental health services are an essential component for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. The mental health practitioner's role has become more meaningful as the complexities surrounding HIV/AIDS treatment necessitate access to psychological care, especially as it relates to aspects such as medication treatment. Mental health practitioners need specific training in working with HIV-affected populations. SAMHSA devotes efforts to address the overlap between mental disorders and HIV/AIDS through a program designed to educate clinicians in the neuropsychiatric, ethical, adherence, and psychosocial aspects of HIV/AIDS. This SAMHSA program, which has been funded under HIV/AIDS Education, furthers the development of a skilled and knowledgeable mental and behavioral health care workforce.

Since this program was launched under SAMHSA, more than 130,000 psychiatrists, psychologists, medical students, social workers, and allied behavioral health providers have participated in professional education and training activities. Additionally, since 2014, this program has produced more than 100 virtual and in-person training forums and has created widely-available evidence-based guidance for mental health professionals. This program is essential to increasing the availability of well-trained clinicians, and preparing the next generation of health care professionals to deliver comprehensive and responsive mental health services to the nation's most vulnerable communities at risk for, or heavily burdened by, HIV infection.

While we acknowledge that the current budget climate is extraordinarily challenging, we urge you to again take bipartisan leadership to sustain funding for this critical program aiding some of the most disenfranchised Americans living with mental health disorders and HIV. Despite the omission of dedicated funding for SAMHSA HIV/AIDS Education Programs in the recent House Appropriations Committee Report, the Senate Appropriations Committee previously committed \$771,000 in FY 2017 for SAMHSA to administer this vital education program. **We request that the Subcommittee provide continued funding to sustain the Mental Health Care Provider Education in HIV/AIDS Program, as itemized in SAMHSA's FY 2018 budget request.**

Support for this SAMHSA program to increase the availability of services to address the pressing need for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS is of critical importance. Research shows that

integrated mental health and medical care can increase HIV treatment adherence and improve overall health outcomes.

We thank you for the Subcommittee's past leadership in investing in health care services, particularly for individuals living with mental health and/or substance use disorders; and we urge continued support for robust systems of care with innovative programs and a high-performing workforce. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



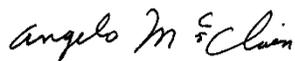
David Offensend
President and Chief Executive Officer
Education Development Center, Inc.



Dr. Saul Levin
Chief Executive Officer and Medical Director
American Psychiatric Association



Dr. Arthur C. Evans, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
American Psychological Association



Dr. Angelo McClain
Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Social Workers

CC: All members of the Senate Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations
Ms. Kana Enomoto, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, SAMHSA