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June 11, 2018

The Honorable Orin Hatch
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hatch and Ranking Member Wyden:

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Association Practice Organization to commend your committee's consideration of legislation to help address the opioid crisis. Our organizations comprise nearly 115,700 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students.

Strong federal leadership is desperately needed to address the opioid epidemic. According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdoses killed more than 63,000 Americans in 2016, a 21.5% increase over the previous year's death rate. Roughly two-thirds of these deaths involved an opioid. However, CDC reports that cocaine- and psychostimulant-related overdose death rates increased substantially more than rates for overdoses related to prescription opioids or heroin. These numbers show that it is imperative that we take a broad public health approach in strengthening our nation's substance use treatment system.

Our priorities for addressing the opioid crisis include the following:

- Promoting non-pharmacologic treatment for chronic pain and increasing access to integrated pain management services and comorbid mental health disorders;
- Providing a comprehensive continuum of services for those addicted to opioids, including both psychotherapy and counseling as part of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and other psychosocial interventions beyond MAT;
- Increasing access to recovery support services, including housing, education, and supported employment;
- Expanding the mental health and substance use treatment workforce, retaining providers already in the workforce and increasing their participation rates in both Medicaid and Medicare, and improving providers' effectiveness through education and training;

- Increasing investments in research on psychosocial interventions to treat both chronic pain and opioid addiction/other substance use disorders;
- Making administrative and infrastructure improvements in the service delivery system, such as through stronger enforcement of mental health and substance use disorder parity laws and regulations, changing child welfare system programs so that families impacted by opioid addiction are kept together, and improving services provided by drug courts.

The bipartisan bills before your committee help address most of these areas, and we urge their approval and enactment along with proposals from the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee. We note, however, that further initiatives will be needed, including recommendations we have previously shared with your committee. An effective response to the opioid crisis will also require Congress to allocate substantial, sustained new funding to update and expand our nation's substance use disorder and mental health treatment system after decades of neglect and underfunding.

Thank you for your committee's work in considering important improvements in Medicaid, Medicare, and human services programs to increase access to effective treatment and reduce rates of opioid addiction. We applaud your efforts and look forward to continued work with your offices on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur C. Evans, Jr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Arthur C. Evans, Jr., Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer