

April 20, 2016

The Honorable Larry Bucshon
U.S. House of Representatives
1005 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Bucshon and Tonko:

On behalf of the National Council for Behavioral Health and our 2,700 member organizations, I am writing today to thank you for your introduction of the Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Expansion and Modernization Act.

Your bipartisan legislation addresses the opioid crisis striking at the heart of America. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 78 people die every day from an opioid overdose, a rate that has quadrupled since 1999. From 2000 to 2014 alone, more than half a million Americans died from drug overdoses. Meanwhile, access to effective opioid treatment remains elusive: data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health show that less than 11 percent of Americans who need treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol problem receive it.

Addiction must be treated like any other chronic disease in this country, with a full continuum of treatment options based on the person's level of need. Medication-assisted treatments such as buprenorphine, methadone, or naltrexone are a critical part of this continuum—yet, current caps on the number of patients whom buprenorphine prescribers may treat has hindered access to evidence-based care.

Your legislation finds the right balance between expanding prescribers' ability to care for more patients in need of medication-assisted treatment while reducing the risks for diversion and abuse. Under your bill, physician prescribers could more than double their number of patients, while qualified prescribers such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners would be added to the types of prescribers who may use buprenorphine as part of their patients' treatment regimen.

Importantly, your legislation imposes significant training requirements, along with participation by the patient in signing off on a treatment plan. We are especially grateful that the bill requires prescribers to provide, coordinate with, or refer to other services in the continuum of addiction treatment, such as counseling and other supports.

The National Council greatly appreciates your commitment to this issue and we look forward to working with you and your staff to support this legislation in the 114th Congress.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg
President and CEO
National Council for Behavioral Health