

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

May 3, 2024

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo,

We write to request that the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance hold a hearing to examine the fentanyl crisis and ways to expand access to evidence-based treatments, especially FDA-approved medication-assisted treatment, through public programs like Medicaid.

In recent years, fentanyl overdoses have risen at an alarming rate, and today every state is impacted by this epidemic. More than 112,000 Americans died from fatal overdoses in 2023 – the largest number in history – and public health experts say that fentanyl is now responsible for the majority of drug deaths.¹ While the country has long been coping with the opioid crisis, fentanyl poses a new and unique threat because it is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.²

Americans receiving Medicaid benefits are disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis. Medicaid patients are four times more likely to overdose on opioids than patients on commercial insurance, but they face barriers to accessing treatment.³ Older Americans on Medicare are also uniquely impacted by the opioid crisis, and a federal oversight report found that only 18% of Medicare enrollees received recommended addiction medication treatments.⁴

As members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, we believe that we have a duty to examine this crisis and find ways to reduce fentanyl overdoses and save lives. We must explore how we can leverage the jurisdictional power of our committee to provide more treatment options and capacity for all Americans. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

¹ Brian Mann et. al., *In 2023 fentanyl overdoses ravaged the U.S. and fueled a new culture war fight*, NPR (Dec. 28, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/28/1220881380/overdose-fentanyl-drugs-addiction>.

² *Fentanyl Facts*, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (April 4, 2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html#:~:text=Fentanyl%20is%20a%20synthetic%20opioid,nonfatal%20overdoses%20in%20the%20U.S.>

³ Simar Bajaj, *'We fail people': New data on disparities in Medicaid access to opioid addiction treatment*, STAT (June 23, 2023), <https://www.statnews.com/2023/06/23/opioid-addiction-treatment-access-2/>.

⁴ Andrew Joseph, *Medicare provides insufficient access to opioid addiction treatment, report finds*, STAT (Sep. 15, 2022), <https://www.statnews.com/2022/09/15/medicare-provides-insufficient-access-to-opioid-addiction-treatment-report-finds/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Maria Cantwell".

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Cassidy, M.D.". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sheldon Whitehouse".

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator