



May 8, 2019

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
United States House of Representatives
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Cummings and Senator Warren,

On behalf of Harm Reduction Coalition, a national organization focused on addressing the intersection between substance use and health, I am proud to offer our support for the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency (CARE) Act of 2019.

The overdose epidemic has had devastating consequences on people who use drugs, their loved ones, and their communities across the country. While we have been encouraged by many of the steps taken by Congress to advance evidence-based strategies and increase access to federal resources in response to this crisis, Harm Reduction Coalition strongly believes that our nation still lacks sufficient investment and political will to address the challenge of the current epidemic and build the necessary infrastructure to prevent future drug-related health crises.

The CARE Act of 2019 provides a compelling vision, framework, and level of investment necessary to reverse the course of the overdose epidemic and promote the safety and welfare of people most at risk of overdose. Notably, the CARE Act of 2019 includes key provisions that represent critical innovations to our response to the overdose crisis and broader challenges related to substance use. First, the CARE Act of 2019 calls for the establishment of planning councils specifically inclusive of people with substance use disorders, people in recovery, and people with histories of incarceration. This measure aligns with Harm Reduction Coalition's principles of meaningful involvement of people with lived experience in the policies and programs that affect their lives. Second, the CARE Act of 2019 provides for the funding of harm reduction services, which may include syringe services programs and overdose education and naloxone distribution programs. The inclusion of harm reduction represents a core strength of this bill and represents an acknowledgement of the critical – though to date underappreciated – role that these programs play on the frontlines of overdose and drug user health. Finally, the CARE Act of 2019 recognizes the urgent need to broaden availability and affordability of overdose reversal medication, through establishment of a federal purchasing program. Harm Reduction Coalition strongly supports any efforts that result in greater access to naloxone for people who use drugs and their loved ones.

In an op-ed published by the Philadelphia Inquirer last year on applying lessons from the HIV/AIDS crisis to addressing opioid overdose, I described three key insights relevant to both epidemics: "Stigma is the enemy, activism is the accelerator, and medicines work only when people have access to them."¹ The

¹ Raymond, D. How lessons from HIV/AIDS crisis can apply to the opioid crisis. Philadelphia Inquirer, July 27, 2018.

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CARE Act of 2019 wisely draws from the lessons learned from the federal response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, including a commitment to sustained and robust financing, local stakeholder involvement – including by people living with HIV/AIDS – in prioritization of strategies and resource allocation, an emphasis on closing gaps in health care and social services infrastructure, and responsiveness to communities in greatest need.

As with the HIV/AIDS crisis, the overdose epidemic is a product of multiple structural forces including racialized drug policies, economic disruption and intergenerational poverty, and the legacy of siloing and underinvestment of substance use services and treatment. The CARE Act of 2019 represents a vital and strategic response to the challenges of our communities, and Harm Reduction Coalition looks forward to working with your offices, Congress, and our communities to advance this legislation.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Raymond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" being more prominent than the last name "Raymond".

Daniel Raymond
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Harm Reduction Coalition

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