



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 13, 2021**

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**60+ Organizations Urge HHS Sec. Becerra to Take Immediate Action on Opioid Crisis
*Reduce barriers to substance use disorder treatments***

Washington, DC (April 13, 2021) – A diverse group of organizations advocating for equitable access to substance use disorder (SUD) treatments today submitted a letter, spearheaded by the [Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness](#), [The Kennedy Forum](#), and [Shatterproof](#), to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra requesting immediate action to combat the addiction crisis.

The group is asking the Administration to take actions to reduce barriers to opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment associated with the DATA 2000 X-Waiver and to call upon Congress to eliminate the X-Waiver completely.

Specifically, they are calling for Secretary Becerra to:

- **Address the Significant Access Challenges and Barriers.** The waiver requirement has prevented those with OUD from receiving life-saving care. More than 95 percent of practitioners lack the X-Waiver and thus are unable prescribe buprenorphine.
- **Help Eliminate Stigma Around SUDs.** The existence of the X-Waiver sends a terrible message to practitioners and the public alike: that treating OUD with buprenorphine requires separate, stigmatizing rules and that buprenorphine is inherently more dangerous than the powerful opioids that have fueled this crisis.
- **Act Now - There is an Urgent Need.** During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, fatal drug overdoses have skyrocketed to a record 88,000 overdose deaths in the year ending August 2020. HHS should immediately take any actions within its authority to reduce the disproportionately high barrier to life-saving OUD treatment with buprenorphine created by the X-Waiver.

“Across the nation, the opioid crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the deficiencies in access to OUD treatment have further come to the forefront, especially in communities of color. The X-Waiver requirements remain a burdensome barrier that needs to

be removed to help reduce stigma and expand access to treatment,” **Pamela Greenberg, President and CEO, ABHW.**

“Tens of thousands of Americans are needlessly dying each year from opioid overdoses because federal law limits access to life-saving treatment. The Administration should take immediate executive action to reduce the deadly effects of the discriminatory X-Waiver, while calling upon Congress to eliminate it entirely,” **Former U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum.**

“We have an urgent responsibility to remove barriers to addiction treatment. Buprenorphine treatment has been restricted by the X-Waiver policy and this has resulted in a disparity of access, especially for communities of color. Changing this policy is necessary, but not sufficient. It must be combined with a scalable strategy to educate all medical professionals on prevention and treatment of addiction,” **Kevin Roy, Chief Public Policy Officer, Shatterproof.**

Read the joint letter [HERE](#).

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About ABHW:

ABHW is the leading health plan association working to improve access and quality of care for mental health and substance use disorders. ABHW’s members include national and regional health plans who care for more than 200 million people. Together we work to reduce stigma and advance federal policy on mental health and addiction care. Member companies - Aetna Behavioral Health, AmeriHealth Caritas, Anthem/Beacon, Centene Corporation, Cigna, Kaiser Permanente, Magellan Health, New Directions Behavioral Health, and Optum.

About The Kennedy Forum:

Founded in 2013 by former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.), The Kennedy Forum leads a national dialogue on transforming the health care system by uniting mental health advocates, business leaders, and policymakers around a common set of principles, including full implementation of the Federal Parity Law. Launched in celebration of the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy’s signing of the landmark Community Mental Health Act, the nonprofit aims to achieve health equity by advancing evidence-based practices, policies, and programming for the treatment of mental health and addiction.

About Shatterproof:

Shatterproof is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to reversing the addiction crisis in the United States. Shatterproof harnesses the models of business, the rigor of science and the power of a national movement to create change and save lives through three pillars of work: revolutionizing the addiction treatment system, breaking down addiction-related stigmas and supporting and empowering our communities.