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**Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy Issues Recommendations to the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis**

*Specific Calls to Action Define FEMA-like Response to Stopping Cycle of Death and Despair*

Washington, D.C. / PR web / October 26, 2017 – Per his appointed role on the Opioid Commission, former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.) has issued a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the concurrent opioid and suicide epidemic in the U.S., outlining a detailed road map for the additional funding, coordination, manpower, and federal and state commitments necessary to save lives. Access the full set of Recommendations [here](#). Highlights from the document include:

**Declaration of Federal Emergency**—A FEMA-like response must be deployed, securing collaboration between the government and private sectors, as well as for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

**Insurance Coverage and Treatment**

- As part of the action plan required by the 21st Century Cures Act, the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS) should direct all state agencies with the responsibility of enforcing the Federal Parity Law to pursue targeted market conduct examinations and pre-market data examinations of health insurers.
- We must prevent the insurance marketplaces from descending into chaos. The solution put forth by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) to fund cost-sharing reductions for two years in order to stabilize the individual marketplaces should be passed to ensure families of limited means have access to mental health and addiction treatment.
- State Medicaid programs should cover all FDA-approved Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) drugs for opioid use disorder without prior authorization.
- Congress should eliminate the Medicare 190-day lifetime inpatient limit on treatment in a psychiatric hospital.
- Congress should pass the bipartisan Overdose Prevention and Patient Safety Act in the House (H.R. 3545) and Protecting Jessica Grubb's Legacy Act (S. 1850) in the Senate, which will allow for the appropriate sharing of substance use treatment information among providers and health systems, and prevent inappropriate prescribing of opioids to patients with substance use disorder.
- States and localities should expand other supportive services such as peer support, community integration, job and skill training, recovery coaches, and education services—and both commercial and public payers should reimburse for these services.

**Prevention and Early Intervention**

- Tech giants such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, and others should contribute \$500 million in pro-bono advertising across multiple platforms.
- Primary care professionals conducting preventive services should receive adequate education and training on substance use disorders and information on effective screening and assessment tools.

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- Congress should substantially increase annual appropriations for the Foster Care Program to provide adequate support for the children who have been subjected to trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which are inclusive of being separated from parents and living in a house with active substance misuse.
- All health plans should provide and reimburse for evidence-based mental health and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) screening during annual well-child exams and adult annual physical exams.
- School districts and private schools should invest in evidence-based social-emotional learning and life/coping skill programs, additional school counselors, and suicide prevention plans.

### **Criminal Justice Reforms**

- Congress should increase appropriations for drug court programs, mental health and drug treatment alternatives to incarceration programs, and mental health courts.
- Criminal records should be expunged after successful reintegration into society for those with non-violent, non-distribution drug convictions.
- The Federal Bureau of Prisons should eliminate its exclusion of MAT in federal prisons.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

- Congress should appropriate additional funding for on-reservation treatment centers in Indian Country, supportive housing for those in recovery, child care resources for the children of those with active SUD, enhanced law enforcement resources, and preventive addiction programs.
- Congress should appropriate additional funding to the Dept. of Veterans Affairs to increase behavioral health professionals and build the Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.
- Congress should utilize tax credits and grant programs to fund new (or existing) newborn intensive care units in all hospitals equipped to care for infants experiencing opioid withdrawal.

**Workforce**—Congress should increase funding for the National Health Service Corps scholarship and loan repayments program to increase the supply of behavioral health professionals.

**Research**—The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) should continue its partnership with private pharmaceutical companies to develop and further test long-acting injectables of both buprenorphine and naltrexone; develop and test additional medications to treat substance use disorders generally, and opioid use disorders specifically; further develop and test non-addicting pain medications that do not activate the reward and respiratory-arresting effects of current opioid agonist medications.

“The Senate passed legislation that would provide \$36.4 billion for hurricane and wildfire relief in response to natural disasters that claimed 200 lives. Meanwhile, nearly 17,000 people have died from drug overdoses and suicides since Hurricane Harvey made landfall, and Congress has not appropriated any new money to address what has become the biggest public health crisis of our time,” says former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.), founder of The Kennedy Forum. “Instead, a budget resolution passed by the Senate will slash Medicaid funding by \$1 trillion over the next decade, despite the fact that Medicaid is the largest single source of funding for mental health and addiction treatment. We need immediate action to stop the devastating storm of addiction and suicide sweeping our nation.”

The Commission, created by Presidential Executive Order 13784, is expected to release its final recommendations on November 1.

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**About The Kennedy Forum**

Founded in 2013 by former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy (D-R.I.), The Kennedy Forum focuses on advancing evidence-based practices, policies, and programming in mental health and substance use issues. This is achieved through promoting public discourse in health and addiction issues, ensuring equal coverage for patients living with mental health and/or substance use disorders; and advancing prevention and treatment throughout the entire continuum of the healthcare delivery system. The Kennedy Forum's collaborative partnerships help to foster greater provider accountability, integration and coordination, cutting-edge technologies, and brain fitness and health. The nonprofit organization publishes frequent issue briefs and is a repository of other educational resources on parity issues. To learn more, visit [www.thekennedyforum.org](http://www.thekennedyforum.org).