

February 23, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (AAAP), I am writing to the Senate HELP Committee to endorse without reservation the nomination of Xavier Becerra as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

AAAP is a nonprofit scientific and professional organization with more than 1,700 members who specialize in evidence-based practices in the clinical treatment of substance use disorders and co-occurring mental disorders. AAAP's overall mission is to advocate for and promote evidence-based practices in addressing all substance use disorders and co-occurring mental disorders. AAAP is the lead organization for two SAMHSA-funded initiatives, *Providers Clinical Support System (PCSS)* and the *Opioid Response Network (ORN)*. Both initiatives involve large coalitions representing the major national professional health professional organizations, as well as prevention, treatment and recovery and related stakeholders, focusing on providing at no cost training, mentorship and education in the prevention and treatment of opioid use and stimulant use disorders.

Over 30 years in public service, Mr. Becerra has focused on ensuring Americans receive the best health care at the best possible price, from his decades on the House Ways and Means Committee to the last four years serving as Attorney General of the largest state Department of Justice in the country. Mr. Becerra brings deep experience handling the broad array of issues under HHS's purview. HHS has vast responsibilities—everything from managing federal health programs, to coordinating public health.

Mr. Becerra has a strong track record and a depth of experience in formulating and implementing policies and programs to address the crisis of opioid addiction. As California Attorney General, he has been responsible for overseeing the state's prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) CURES (Controlled Substance Utilization

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Review and Evaluation System) a database of Schedule II, III and IV controlled substance prescriptions dispensed in California. CURES is committed to the reduction of prescription drug abuse and diversion without affecting legitimate medical practice, patient care, or privacy. As Attorney General, Mr. Becerra has also promoted regulations to protect patient data while also ensuring the data can be used appropriately to protect against the diversion and abuse of prescription drugs.

As his state's Attorney General, Mr. Becerra has urged health insurance providers to remove prior authorization requirements for medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and in a 2019 letter addressed to 17 health insurance executives, Mr. Becerra called upon "insurance providers to join us in our efforts to give patients the treatment they need and deserve, without the burdens of lengthy medical paperwork and processes." In May 2018, AG Becerra joined a bipartisan coalition of 39 states urging Congress to combat the opioid epidemic by passing the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) 2.0 and the Comprehensive Addiction Reform, Education, and Safety (CARES) 2.0 Act.

He has sought accountability for the drug companies responsible for the opioid crisis and won landmark settlements to be used to fund opioid treatment. As recently as February 4, 2021, Attorney General Becerra, along with a coalition of attorneys general from 47 states, successfully reached a settlement with one of the world's largest consulting firms, McKinsey and Company, for the company's role in advising opioid manufacturing companies, helping those companies promote their drugs, and profiting from the opioid epidemic. The McKinsey settlement follows upon other successful settlements Mr. Becerra and the bipartisan coalition of state attorneys general with a number of opioid manufacturers, including Mallinckrodt and Purdue Pharma and for the companies' illegal and misleading marketing and sales practices played in contributing to the opioid crisis. The settlements in these cases will be used to abate the damage caused by opioids to the families and communities of our nation.

During his tenure on the House Ways and Means Committee and continuing as the California Attorney General, Mr. Becerra has a strong record on mental health parity. As Attorney General, Mr. Becerra has long enforced the mental health parity laws that he helped to pass in Congress, and he has worked tirelessly to ensure insurance companies expand provider networks and guarantee equal treatment for mental health conditions in insurance plans. As the COVID pandemic has created a mental health crisis as well as a public health crisis, Mr. Becerra strongly believes that it is critical to enforce mental health parity laws if we are to have a meaningful impact on addressing this public health need. In particular, during his service in Sacramento, Attorney General Becerra urged California's four largest health insurance providers to demonstrate their compliance with state and federal mental health parity laws.

On behalf of the AAAP Board of Directors and our members, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to offer our strong support and endorsement of Mr. Xavier Becerra as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Sincerely,



Kevin A. Sevarino, MD, PhD
President, AAAP