

April 30, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the undersigned allied psychiatry organizations, respectfully ask that you ensure mental health and substance use disorder treatment and services remain essential priorities within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and that the programs within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) are unimpeded to support the mental health of our communities and to address chronic disease with a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. While we know there is no health without mental health, and mental health integration is essential for a healthy nation, we are concerned that the recent proposed reorganization of HHS will inevitably lead to cutting programs and services that so many Americans with mental health and substance use disorders (SUD) depend on. Mental disorders are a chronic disease and are inseparable from physical health. The success of your “Make America Healthy Again” initiative depends on federal leadership that ensures mental health services are evidence-based, effectively deployed, and delivered throughout the country.

We are currently in a mental health and substance use crisis. SAMHSA’s critical mission to “lead public health and service delivery efforts that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse and provide treatment and supports while ensuring access and better outcomes for all Americans” is more important than ever. The decision to eliminate SAMHSA threatens to destabilize the federal leadership structure essential to the nation’s mental health system. It is critical to underscore that SAMHSA does not merely perform administrative functions, it fulfills a statutory mandate under P.L. 102-321 to lead national efforts in mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery support. Moreover, many of SAMHSA’s programs are both established in law and funded annually through Congressional appropriations.

SAMHSA’s programs across the country have contributed to the advances our nation has made in fighting the mental health and SUD crisis. It has transformed community mental health centers into certified community behavioral health centers by offering a comprehensive array of services, including crisis intervention, and integrating physical health services with mental health and substance use services. By doing so, providing more effective and less costly care. Its impact across the nation is widespread and lifesaving. Among other vital services, it collects key data on mental health and addiction that informs community and practice. It also provides education to help develop the future mental health workforce and provides state mental health and substance use systems with guidance on evidence-based community services. Prior to the creation of these services, health systems and patients often relied on later state interventions, resulting in high costs to taxpayers, poor outcomes, and low quality of life. Defunding or dismantling these programs not only harms vulnerable populations but also increases downstream societal costs in criminal justice, homelessness, and emergency care.

SAMHSA plays a leading role in addressing the nation's substance use disorders, which is particularly critical in light of the continuing opioid epidemic. It also funds and guides the operations of the 988 national suicide and crisis line which has been an important lifeline for so many fielding more than 14.5 million calls, texts, and chats in just its first two years. We thank President Trump for the leadership he showed by declaring America's opioid crisis as a public health emergency in 2017, and again most recently in January, as well as the law he signed establishing the 988 national suicide and crisis line in 2020.

We respectfully ask that you ensure that mental health and substance use remain essential priorities within HHS. Without federal leadership, the coordination framework that aligns federal and state systems will collapse, creating fragmentation, service disruption, and inconsistency in mental health and substance use care delivery across the country.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss our perspective on the value of these vital programs and to work with you on strategies and solutions to ensure millions of Americans receive the mental health care they need to live healthy and productive lives. Please contact Kristin Kroeger, APA's Chief of Advocacy, Policy and Practice Advancement at kkroeger@psych.org so we can begin our work together.

Best,

American Psychiatric Association
Academy of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Community Psychiatry
American Association for Emergency Psychiatry
American Association of Chairs of Departments of Psychiatry
American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry
Association of LGBTQ Psychiatrists
Association of Women Psychiatrists
Black Psychiatrists of America
Clinical TMS Society
Society of Biological Psychiatry
Southern Psychiatric Association