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**RE: Washington DC Opioid Roundtable**

Dear Mr. Thompson and Mr. Kelly,

On behalf of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), a national medical specialty society representing more than 5,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the treatment and prevention of addiction, I would like to thank you for the invitation to participate in the Washington, DC Opioid Roundtable and for the opportunity to provide recommendations and describe ASAM's ongoing efforts to combat the current epidemic of addiction involving opioids and related overdose deaths.

ASAM's current work includes educating clinicians on the prevention and treatment of addiction; developing and disseminating clinical guidelines and treatment standards; advocating for federal and state laws and payer policies that promote access to evidence-based care; and partnering with allied organizations to spread best practices, advance research, and challenge stigma. I will describe a few of our key initiatives at the end of this letter, but first want to share ASAM's recommendations for a comprehensive government and community response to the opioid crisis.

**Recommendations**

- **Identify and incentivize the scale and replication of evidence-based prevention and treatment approaches.** ASAM believes recipients of government grants, loans and other funds for substance use disorder prevention or treatment programs should use evidence-based practices.

We also support research and the development of new and innovative treatments for substance use disorder that will contribute to the body of knowledge that is needed for emergent or experimental programs and activities to become evidence-based.

There are many persistent misconceptions about the disease of addiction, and for too long those misconceptions have informed various approaches to prevent or treat addiction. We need a culture change in this country that acknowledges the neuroscientific discoveries that have been made in understanding addiction's effects on the brain, the science of reducing risk and promoting resilience to prevent addiction, and the medical advances in treatment that have been proven to be effective at reducing relapse and overdose deaths and supporting patients in remission and recovery.

When it comes to addiction involving opioid use, the most effective treatment options involve the use of medications in combination with specific, psychosocial interventions to support remission and recovery and involve a certified addiction medicine specialist in the patient's care. Further, to be effective, addiction treatment programs should meet level-of-care standards defined by the ASAM Criteria and meet evidence-base standards as outlined by the *ASAM National Practice Guideline for the Use of Medications in the Treatment of Addiction Involving Opioid Use*.

- **Improve coverage and payment for evidence-based treatment.** Federal and state governments, employers, unions, and other payers and purchasers of health insurance coverage should work together to ensure that health plans cover and adequately pay for treatment services that have been proven to be effective, and should end coverage and payment for “treatment” programs whose philosophies and approaches don't align with the current science.
- **Increase use of medications for addiction treatment in correctional settings, and ensure individuals reentering the community are connected with a healthcare provider for ongoing treatment.** Up to nineteen percent of individuals in America's jail and state prison systems have regularly used opioids prior to incarceration. While release from jail and prison is associated with a dramatic increase in the risk of death from opioid overdose among those with opioid use disorder, there are considerable data to show that treatment with medication during and following incarceration can reduce deaths and improve outcomes for these individuals. All justice-involved individuals should be screened for substance use and mental health disorders and offered evidence-based treatment for both as clinically indicated. Moreover, individuals reentering the community should be connected with an appropriate healthcare professional for ongoing treatment and educated on the risk of unintentional overdose. An opioid antagonist (naloxone) overdose kit or prescription and financial means (such as insurance/Medicaid) for obtaining the kit may be given to the individual if possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Joint Public Correctional Policy Statement on the Treatment of Opioid Use Disorders for Justice Involved Individuals, A Joint Statement by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), available at <https://www.asam.org/advocacy/find-a-policy->

- **Educate the public and health care providers about addiction as a chronic brain disease that can be effectively treated with evidence-based interventions.** Given the persistent public misconceptions about addiction and the pernicious way they influence the availability of effective prevention and treatment services, there is dire need for a sophisticated and robust public education campaign to dispel stigma and raise awareness about the science of addiction. Public education should include information about the types of treatment options that have been shown to be effective, such as medications for addiction involving opioid use, so that patients and families know how to identify quality treatment services.
- **Increase education related to addiction treatment and pain management in health professional school curricula.** Health care professionals-in-training currently receive very little formal instruction on these topics and feel unprepared to manage pain or identify and treat patients with addiction upon graduation. Our nation's clinical schools should be obligated to equip the next generation of health care professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to address the opioid epidemic.

### Key ASAM Initiatives

ASAM is a collaborative leader in healthcare professional education related to the prevention and treatment of addiction, developer of clinical resources and standards for the practice of addiction medicine, and advocates for increased access to evidence-based prevention and treatment services.

#### *Education*

- ASAM is the largest provider of continuing medical education (CME) on addiction medicine, reaching more than 30,000 registrants through live and online courses in the past year.
- ASAM's Fundamentals of Addiction Medicine course is designed to improve the understanding of addiction and its treatment among non-addiction specialist medical providers and trains participants to identify and diagnose addiction, screen and provide early intervention, develop individualized treatment protocols, and adopt evidence-based practices.
- ASAM is one of only five medical associations authorized by the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 to provide buprenorphine waiver training for physicians, and has recently partnered with the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) and American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) to provide the training to NPs and PAs.
- ASAM is a member of the Collaborative for REMS Education (CO\*RE), one of the approved providers of the extended-release long-acting opioids risk evaluation and

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[statement/view-policy-statement/public-policy-statements/2018/03/20/joint-public-correctional-policy-statement-on-the-treatment-of-opioid-use-disorders-for-justice-involved-individuals](#)

mitigation strategy (ER/LA REMS) training. Started in 2010, CO\*RE's mission is to promote individual and population health and public safety through timely, evidence-based, outcome-oriented and interprofessional education related to the comprehensive management of pain, addiction, and their co-morbidities. CO\*RE has been an approved provider of ER/LA REMS training since 2013 and has reached more than 170,000 total learners.

### *Quality Improvement*

- ASAM was the first to define one set of nationally recognized, research-validated criteria – The ASAM Criteria – for providing outcome-oriented and results-based care in the treatment of addiction. Today, The ASAM Criteria is the nation's most comprehensive and widely used set of guidelines to match patients to the best level of care based on their disease severity. The Criteria are used by clinicians and payers across all care settings and the use of The ASAM Criteria is required in more than 30 states.
- ASAM also offers a decision support tool – *CONTINUUM™* – for providers to conduct objective assessments to place patients in the correct level of care based on The ASAM Criteria. *CONTINUUM™* is a family of products that allows clinicians and non-clinicians to assess patients with addictive, substance-related and co-occurring conditions through computer-guided, structured interviews.
- ASAM has led and supported the development and dissemination of first-of-their kind clinical guideline and consensus documents to inform evidence-based addiction treatment, including the *National Practice Guideline for the Use of Medications in the Treatment of Addiction Involving Opioid Use*, the *Appropriate Use of Drug Testing in Clinical Addiction Medicine* consensus document, the *Standards of Care for the Addiction Specialist Physician*.
- ASAM is also a lead advocate for and developer of quality measures for addiction treatment specialists, and has worked with the Veteran's Health Administration to specify and test three quality measures for addiction specialists.

### *Advocacy and Public Awareness*

- ASAM is the convener of the Coalition to Stop Opioid Overdose, a broad coalition of more than 30 health care professional, social service provider, criminal justice and patient advocacy organizations who share the goal of a comprehensive federal response to the opioid epidemic.
- ASAM is the organizer of National Addiction Treatment Week, an annual, multi-stakeholder public affairs effort to raise awareness of addiction as a chronic disease for which effective treatment is available, and to promote the growth of a qualified addiction treatment workforce.
- ASAM has translated its *National Practice Guideline for the Use of Medications in the Treatment of Addiction Involving Opioid Use* into *Opioid Addiction Treatment: A Guide for Patients, Families and Friends*. This free patient guide includes information on assessment,

treatment overview (including treatment plans, patient participation, and counseling), and all the medications available to treatment opioid use and overdose. It also provides links to find a provider and support groups for patients and families.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide ASAM's recommendations for how to reverse the course of the opioid epidemic and describe the important work that our organization has undertaken to that end. I look forward to participating in the Opioid Roundtable and working with the other invited organizations to identify areas where we can collaborate and amplify our efforts on behalf of patients with addiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Penny S. Mills". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "M".

Penny S. Mills  
Executive Vice President/CEO  
American Society of Addiction Medicine