

Testimony for the House Energy & Commerce Committee Congressman Donald Norcross

Thank you for holding this Member Day on this national emergency. More than 60,000 of our loved ones will die this year to the disease of addiction. This is a national emergency. The fact may seem painfully obvious to the millions of families across America with a family member who is struggling with, or has been lost to, addiction. Yet, many still refuse to call this a disease or an emergency. At 60,000-plus deaths a year, this number is more than the American lives lost that in the whole of the Vietnam War. And 60,000 is probably a low estimate, because the stigma associated with addiction causes many families to suffer shame if the cause were publicly disclosed.

The American Medical Association defines addiction as a disease-not a mental failing. Do we blame those battling cancer, diabetes, or heart disease? No. We must have the same reaction for those battling addiction. The stigma must end if we have any hope in addressing this crisis. It is a life-long issue and there is currently a major perception problem in our society.

Another problem? Trumpcare. The Republican efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act will hurt those struggling with the disease of addiction. Currently, the Affordable Care Act is working to aid those with mental health service needs. In Medicaid-expansion states, including New Jersey, substance use and mental health disorder hospitalizations fell from 20% in 2013 to 5% in 2015. We should be working to improve the Affordable Care Act, not dismantle it.

This is a multi-faceted problem that requires multi-faceted solutions. We have had some notable successes. For example, we are now sharing drug information between New Jersey and Pennsylvania after an appeal to the governors of both states. Plus, in my home state of New Jersey, the expansion of Narcan access is saving many lives. On the federal level, my recently-passed provision to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act helps veterans dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and opioid addiction.

I serve as the Vice-Chair to the Bipartisan Task Force to Combat the Heroin Epidemic. This year alone, we have a legislative agenda with a dozen policy solutions. From helping states expand inpatient treatment, to improving the response to babies who were exposed to opioids during pregnancy, we are working across party lines for innovative solutions. The Trump Administration recently released a report with many of the same recommendations we have been fighting for in Congress. Now, we all need to put our full support behind the effort.

We must also address gaps in addiction education. Current requirements are not up to par. As it stands, programs are varied and voluntary. In fact, some of the programs only require four hours of addiction education over four years. This is not nearly enough. My *Improve Addiction Education Act* would improve current guidelines and improve the implementation of the medical education regulations that already exist.

We must spread the word that the disease of addiction is a national emergency and we must help those who are suffering. Tell that truth to yourself, your loved ones, and your neighbors. Tell it to your doctor, your pastor and your president. Once we do that, we can begin to act and overcome this crisis. We must invest time, effort and money to save lives. Thank you.