

April 13, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Director Rahul Gupta
Office of National Drug Control Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Becerra and Director Gupta,

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country, who are responsible for safeguarding the health of all Americans. Our members are local leaders in infectious disease prevention and care and are on the front lines of the overdose crisis that claimed the lives of more than 100,000 Americans last year. To combat this ongoing public health crisis, NACCHO supports the implementation of evidence-based harm reduction programs for the prevention and treatment of substance use disorder and its related health consequences.

NACCHO applauds the Biden Administration for focusing its drug policy priorities on ensuring racial equity and promoting harm reduction efforts. Unfortunately, misgivings around the use of certain harm reduction strategies remain among some policymakers and the general public as exemplified by the recent discourse alleging \$30 million for harm reduction in the American Rescue Plan would be used to purchase "crack pipes." Arguments against harm reduction practices are often rooted in stigma and racism. When these arguments are allowed to persist, they can lead to enactment of policies and laws that limit access to life-saving harm reduction services, further exacerbating health inequities for Black people and other people of color who are disproportionately impacted by the overdose crisis.

In order to successfully make progress in addressing the overdose crisis, the Biden Administration must be steadfast in centering harm reduction and racial equity in its drug policy priorities. To that end, we request the administration take the following actions, which are aligned with the administration's commitment to promoting evidence-based public health and public safety interventions:

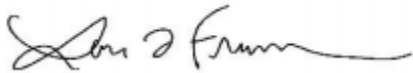
- Work with Congress to remove the federal funding ban on purchasing syringes and other drug paraphernalia for the prevention of infectious disease and overdose deaths.
- Invest in evidence-based harm reduction interventions that will curb the HIV, viral hepatitis, and overdose crises.
- Implement policies to increase access to buprenorphine and methadone as evidence-based treatments for opioid use disorder, and naloxone for opioid overdose reversal.
- Allow states and municipalities to operate life-saving Overdose Prevention Centers without interference from the federal government.



We further encourage you to engage with local health departments throughout the policymaking process so that their community-level public health expertise can help to inform decisions related to harm reduction and overdose prevention. The coordination and collaboration of governmental stakeholders at all levels is imperative to implement strategies that target people most at risk of opioid use and build cohesive harm reduction priorities, strategies, and messaging that accurately represents the challenges faced by the harm reduction community.

NACCHO appreciates the Biden Administration's commitment to addressing the overdose crisis and looks forward to working with you to help make our communities safe and healthy. Please contact Adriane Casalotti, NACCHO Chief of Government and Public Affairs, at acasalotti@naccho.org with any questions or to discuss further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Tremmel Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA
Chief Executive Officer