

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 13, 2021

Nora D. Volkow  
Director  
National Institute on Drug Abuse  
Three White Flint North MSC 6024  
301 North Stonestreet Avenue  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Director Volkow:

We write today regarding a troublesome trend in the United States that tragically has been exacerbated by the effects of the public health pandemic. During our nation's battle with COVID-19, the already-significant addiction and mental health crises have only worsened. While the effect of the pandemic on the opioid crisis has been well-documented, the surge in stimulant and methamphetamine-related use and overdose deaths has garnered less attention. We applaud your efforts at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to combat this crisis and encourage you to continue research efforts to help find medication-based treatments for addiction to methamphetamine use disorders.

From 2012-2018, rates of drug overdose deaths involving methamphetamine increased nearly five-fold in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Ohio has been particularly hard hit, as have many of our rural communities. According to the most recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of methamphetamine and other stimulant-related deaths in Ohio increased 130% in a single year.<sup>2</sup> This recent surge in methamphetamine and stimulant-related deaths is certainly not limited to Ohio. Federal authorities have also seen increasing amounts of methamphetamine in the state of Vermont this year, hindering efforts to keep Americans from using this addictive substance.<sup>3</sup>

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reported on January 21 of this year that nationwide methamphetamine overdose deaths were increasing rapidly across all racial and ethnic groups,<sup>4</sup> and the CDC reported that deaths associated with methamphetamines and other stimulant drugs have steadily increased following implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures.<sup>5</sup> Researchers have found both increases in drug consumption and increases in relapsing are related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While this is a nation-wide issue, our rural communities—such as those in Vermont and Ohio—are particularly suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2774859>

<sup>2</sup> Kariisa M, Scholl L, Wilson N, Seth P, Hoots B. Drug Overdose Deaths Involving Cocaine and Psychostimulants with Abuse Potential — United States, 2003–2017. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019;68:388–395.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6817a3>

<sup>3</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/vermont-burlington-1a6fb338c1150aeac29e0cf8ddfc2608>

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Press Release. *Methamphetamine overdose deaths rise sharply nationwide*. Accessed at: <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/methamphetamine-overdose-deaths-rise-sharply-nationwide>. January 21, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control. Emergency Preparedness and Response. *Increase in Fatal Drug Overdoses Across the United States Driven by Synthetic Opioids Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Accessed at: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00438.asp>. December 17, 2020.

There is a clear public health need for safe and effective treatments for methamphetamine use disorder. From 2016 to 2018, it's estimated that meth use disorder in the US rose by 45 percent—from 684,000 to over 1 million, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. As Director of NIDA, you have even stated that the convergence of drug epidemics is a major problem, making the opioid crisis much more lethal than it has been in the past. We are encouraged by NIDA's January 13<sup>th</sup> announcement that discusses the positive results of a study of a potential new combination treatment for methamphetamine use disorder.<sup>6</sup> This would mark the first medication treatment for methamphetamine addiction, combining two medications that can be safe and effective for treating adults with moderate or severe methamphetamine use disorder. Paired with other cognitive therapies, this can help save lives in our communities and country. We applaud government funding of research designed to explore potential treatments for methamphetamine use disorder such as this, and will continue to advocate for medical research to help our Americans suffering from these devastating substance use disorders.

Given the public health need posed by the increase in methamphetamine use disorder in communities across our country, we encourage NIDA to continue researching and exploring potential life-saving treatments in this area. Our constituents are suffering and the number of tragic overdoses and deaths only continue to climb.

We look forward to working with you to help improve outcomes for Americans facing addiction disorders. Thank you for your consideration in addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,



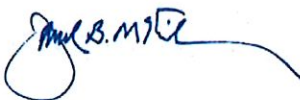
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Robert E. Latta  
Member of Congress



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Peter Welch  
Member of Congress



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David B. McKinley, P.E.  
Member of Congress



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Anthony Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

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<sup>6</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Press Release. *Combination treatment for methamphetamine use disorder shows promise in NIH study.* <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/combination-treatment-methamphetamine-use-disorder-shows-promise-nih-study> . January 13, 2021.

*Tim Ryan*

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Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

*David P. Joyce*

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Member of Congress