

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Over 30 million Americans suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder during their lifetime, but experts estimate that only one in ten people receive treatment. The 21st Century Cures Act was a significant step to support those struggling with an eating disorder by improving the prevention, treatment, and diagnosis of the associated medical conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) both play a critical role in monitoring and studying eating disorder prevalence in youth and adults. We thank you for your bipartisan commitment to supporting eating disorders programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations and request that you continue to support sustained funding for these efforts as you prepare the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) FY 2021 appropriations bill.

Congress passed the 21st Century Cures Act with large, bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate in December 2016. The bill placed a strong emphasis on improving our broken mental health care system, including the mental illness with the highest mortality rate—eating disorders. The eating disorder provisions included in the law, derived from the bipartisan Anna Westin Act of 2015 (H.R. 2515/S. 1865), were designed to improve eating disorder early detection by our health professionals, increase access to quality and affordable treatment for eating disorders under mental health parity, and provide the public with resources to help prevent and identify these conditions.

Early detection is particularly critical to get help for people like Anna Westin, a young woman from Chaska, Minnesota, who took her own life after struggling with anorexia for several years. We can and must do more to identify these conditions so that people with eating disorders can get the care they need. Although many people with eating disorders can live healthy lives when their conditions are identified and they receive treatment, there is a shortage of evidence-based training and education programs that prepare health professionals to recognize and provide proper care to these individuals.

The Anna Westin Act was intended to address this issue. As you prepare the LHHS FY 2021 appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you continue to provide strong funding for Primary Care Training and Enhancement programs at the Health Resources and Services

Administration (HRSA), including enhanced funding for the Education and Training on Eating Disorder program authorized by the Anna Westin Act provisions in Section 13006 of the 21st Century Cures Act. We thank you for including the following report language in the FY 2019 appropriations bill and we urge you to do so again in your FY 2021 appropriations bill to further support and enable HRSA to facilitate evidence-based trainings for health professionals to identify patients with eating disorders and refer them for appropriate treatment:

Primary Care Training and Enhancement – The agreement urges the integration of evidence-based trainings for health professionals to screen, access, intervene, and refer patients to specialized treatment for the severe mental illness of eating disorders as authorized under section 13006 of the 21st Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255).

Understanding that the CDC utilizes a number of public health surveillance measures to monitor eating disorder prevalence, we were disappointed to see the removal of eating disorders surveillance questions from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) in 2015, especially since a teen with anorexia nervosa has ten times the risk of dying than a same-age peer. We thank you for including the following report language in your FY 2020 appropriations bill, and we urge you to do so again in your FY 2021 appropriations bill to support and enable CDC to track, collect, and assess important data on eating disorders among youth and adults:

Eating Disorders –The Committee directs CDC to assist States in collecting data by including standard questions on unhealthy weight control practices for eating disorders, including binge eating, through the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Finally, we respectfully request the highest level of funding possible for the NIH to increase eating disorders research funding across the NIH Institutes and Centers through the NIH Office of the Director. Eating disorders research at the NIH was actually reduced by an estimated 12.5 percent from FY 2019 to FY 2020, despite the fact that eating disorders affect nine percent of the U.S. population during their lifetime. Accordingly, we urge you to also include the following report language in your FY 2021 appropriations bill to increase the level and breadth of funding for eating disorders research at the NIH and to require a report on these efforts:

Eating Disorders – The Committee strongly urges the NIH to support eating disorders research and to explore these issues through multiple Institutes and Centers including the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and National Institute on Drug Abuse. The Committee directs the NIH to inform the Committee on the steps taken to expand eating disorders research and improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.

A strong commitment to fund and prioritize these programs would make a profound difference for the millions of American families affected by eating disorders.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator