March 13, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2021 Labor, Health & Human Services, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations Bill, we urge you to include report language for increased multi-institute eating disorders research under the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that affect 30 million Americans during their lifetimes,¹ and have the second highest mortality rate out of any psychiatric illness, only second to opioid use.² Eating disorders are complex, bio-psycho-social illnesses, that affect people of every age, race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, and when left untreated, can lead to a number of medical conditions such as Type II Diabetes, Heart Failure, Osteoporosis, and Kidney Failure.

Despite the severity of eating disorders, the NIH has historically underfunded eating disorders research it only spent ~0.11% of its budget on this research area between 2015-2018, and the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) only spent ~1.27% of its budget on eating disorders research over the same time period, for a disease that affects 9% of the U.S. population and has the highest treatment cost out of any mental health condition.³⁴

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While underfunded, multiple institutes within NIH have invested in eating disorders research given the complex, co-morbid conditions, from 2015-2018 an average of 44% of eating disorders research was carried out through institutes other than the NIMH. In turn, there are numerous unaddressed areas of research and opportunities to advance our understanding, prevention, identification, and treatment of the disorder, and we urge you to join us in encouraging the NIH to invest in multi-institute eating disorders research. The report language is as follows:

"Eating Disorders. — The Committee commends the NIH for supporting multi-institute research on the chronic, fatal, and serious mental illness of eating disorders that affect 30 million Americans during their lifetimes, and its association with other conditions such as diabetes, infertility, heart disease, PTSD, substance use, co-morbid mental illnesses, and tooth decay. The Committee recognizes that eating disorders are a deadly bio-psycho-social illness and that multiple research topics must be explored to understand, prevent, and treat eating disorders, including psychosocial issues; health disparities and food insecurity; environmental factors such as weight stigma; the complex interplay of metabolic processes; and maternal health. The Committee strongly urges the NIH to increase funding for eating disorders research and explore these and other research questions through multiple Institutes and Centers including NIMH, NIDDK, NIMHD, and NIDA. The Committee directs the NIH to inform the Committee on the steps taken to increase research funding for eating disorders and measures taken to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment."

We urge you to support inclusion of this language within the FY 2021 LHHS Appropriations package.

Sincerely,

Kendra S. Horn
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Scott Peters
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

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Abigail Spanberger
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Peter DeFazio
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