Investing in the Addiction Workforce

America faces a dramatic treatment gap. A recent report by the U.S. Surgeon General, *Facing Addiction in America*, found that only one in 10 Americans with substance use disorders, in 2015, received any form of professional counseling. These numbers are staggering and illustrate the clear demand for increased services. As a country we must commit to building a strong addiction workforce that can take on our nation’s growing crisis in a way that helps individuals with substance use disorders find the treatment services they need. NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals believes that a dedicated, qualified, workforce of addiction professionals is essential to facilitating recovery from substance use disorder.

**Recognition & Support: Support The National Health Service Corps (NHSC)**

In 2018, Congress recognized substance use disorder counselors as eligible for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) loan repayment program. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2028 (P.L.115-141) also increased funding to improve access to addiction treatment in rural communities.

The NHSC is a federal program administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that seeks to attract qualified health professionals to shortage areas around the nation. In exchange for their service, qualified professionals receive scholarships and loan repayments for their education and training costs.

The NHSC is one of the most effective training grounds in the public health workforce. Since its creation in 1972, it has demonstrated a commitment to improving the health of those most in need by recruiting and retaining health professionals to practice in critical areas. Moreover, the NHSC provides new practitioners in addiction health with invaluable experience as it prepares dedicated students and clinicians for the next phase of their careers.

Support increased funding for the National Health Service Corps. Recognition for addiction counselors was a critical step, but we must dedicate the resources necessary to build an addiction workforce capable of meeting the enormous challenges our nation, for today and tomorrow.

**Diversity: Support SAMHSA’s Minority Fellowship Program**

The Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) is a grant initiative that awards funding to organizations to support the development of behavioral health practitioners. NAADAC has worked over the past two decades to increase the diversity of the behavioral health workforce in order to improve prevention, wellness, and treatment for minority populations. Over the past 5 years, we have partnered with SAMHSA’s Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) to expand these efforts.

As Congress seeks to better address substance use and mental health disorders across all populations, we urge lawmakers to support investments in the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) and seek additional avenues at the Department of Health and Human Services to increase opportunities that support a diverse behavioral health workforce. **NAADAC urges Congress to support a funding level**
of $14 million for Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) for FY 2020.

**Grow Workforce: SUD Workforce Loan Repayment**

In addition to advocating for the work of addiction professionals through the appropriations process, NAADAC wishes to thank Congress for supporting The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (H.R. 6), which expands treatment and recovery services, supports research, and helps incentivize pathways for becoming an addiction professional.

- More specifically, the passage of H.R. 6 included critical language from The Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act (H.R. 5102, S. 2524). The legislation will help incentivize students to pursue substance use disorder treatment professions by providing student loan relief. The Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act would provide up to $250,000 toward student loan repayment for those who work as substance use disorder treatment professionals in areas of need. To qualify, eligible health care professionals, such as addictions counselors, need to be employed in a full-time substance use disorder treatment job in a high need area for up to six years, and be masters-level trained.

Incentivizing health care professionals to pursue a career in the areas of SUD treatment, is critically important to ensuring that we are building a workforce to meet the challenges of our time.

- Support for bachelor-level substance use disorder workforce and developing career paths to the masters-level counselor is also critical in meeting the demands of the current crisis. We encourage Congress to include language in future legislation to help incentivize students to pursue substance use disorder treatment as professionals by providing student loan relief at the bachelors-level.

**Thank you for supporting the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act (H.R. 5102, S. 2524) language in H.R. 6. We urge you to consider the benefits of expanding this valuable program to include bachelor-level trained professionals as well.**

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*NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, represents the professional interests of more than 100,000 addiction counselors, educators and other addiction-focused health care professionals in the United States, Canada and abroad. For more information, please visit [www.naadac.org](http://www.naadac.org).*