July 8, 2021

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

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

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

It is estimated that over 30 million Americans will experience a clinically-significant eating disorder during their lifetimes, but experts estimate that only one in ten of them ever receives 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) 2021 appropriations and request that you continue to prioritize sustained funding and support for these efforts as you prepare the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) FY 2022 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 addressing eating disorders—which have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses. 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 early detection of eating disorders by health professionals, increase access to quality and affordable treatment for eating disorders under mental health coverage parity requirements, 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 following a years-long struggle with anorexia. 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 identified eating disorders can lead healthy lives with the right treatment, there is a shortage of evidence-based training and education programs to help health professionals recognize symptoms and provide proper care.

The Anna Westin Act was intended to address this issue. As you prepare the LHHS FY 2022 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 similar report language in the FY 2021 appropriations bill and we urge you to include the following language in your FY 2022 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 – COVID-19 worsened eating disorders across the nation with one study reporting up to 76% of respondents engaging in eating disorder behaviors. Despite the medical and psychiatric acuity associated with eating disorders, many patients remain undetected and untreated as only 20% of surveyed medical residency programs offer elective training in eating disorders and 6% require such training. Within this total, the Committee provides up to $1,000,000 for the program, in coordination with SAMHSA’s National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders, to provide trainings for primary care health professionals to screen, briefly intervene, and refer patients to treatment for the severe mental illness of eating disorders, as authorized under section 13006 of the 21st Century Cures Act (Public Law 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. This data are needed, especially since the risk of a teenager with anorexia nervosa dying is ten times greater than that of a same-age peer. We thank you for including the following report language in your FY 2021 appropriations bill, and we urge you to do so again in your FY 2022 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 funding 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 2022 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 commends NIH for supporting multi-Institute research on the chronic, fatal, and serious mental illnesses encompassing eating disorders. The Committee encourages increased support for eating disorders research and exploration of 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 create a Strategic Plan to address research gaps in genetics, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of eating disorders.

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,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator