

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR GRASSLEY

SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

October 24, 2019

Good morning. I want to welcome our panelists to today's hearing on the one-year anniversary of the SUPPORT Act. This landmark statute, which many of us had a hand in developing, responded to the opioid epidemic on multiple fronts. That crisis has affected every corner of our nation, with 130 Americans, on average, dying from an overdose every single day.

We've devoted a lot of Federal resources to tackling this crisis, and I look forward to hearing from the Surgeon General on this Administration's efforts to implement the SUPPORT Act over the last year.

I also commend Dr. Adams for launching his own unique initiatives to help raise public awareness about the risks of opioid misuse.

Challenges remain, however, because roughly 20 million Americans still struggle with substance abuse disorder. Addiction to other drugs, including meth and heroin, pose an equal, or even greater, challenge for some communities, especially in rural areas. Another issue is that few battling addiction actually seek or receive treatment. Yet another issue is that even those who do seek help lack the expertise to distinguish the good treatment providers from the bad. Solving that last issue, which is the second focus of our hearing, is easier said than done.

The treatment sector includes not just extremely good and extremely bad providers but also many others who fall somewhere in the middle. Some, for example, haven't updated their methods to incorporate the latest research about what works best with recovering addicts.

Also, state requirements for addiction counselors and recovery homes vary. For example, some states require licensing of recovery home operators, while others might only use voluntary certification programs. That is why we have invited two government watchdog agencies and an addiction treatment advocate to our Committee to share their expertise with us today.

First, I want to welcome back to the Committee Dr. Deagan-Macauley, of the Government Accountability Office, who testified before this Committee last year. We've all seen the media reports about so-called "sober homes" in Florida, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and other states that exploited recovering addicts with private insurance benefits. We look forward to hearing from her about GAO's oversight of recovery housing.

I also extend a warm welcome to Gary Cantrell, who leads the Inspector General's investigations team. His investigators worked on a recent high profile case, involving an addiction treatment scam in Ohio. That investigation, in partnership with the FBI and other law enforcement entities, led to the indictment of six people this year. All six pled guilty to Medicaid fraud this month.

Some have called for development of more uniform, measurable addiction treatment standards, by which the public could evaluate the effectiveness of substance use disorder

treatment programs. Our last witness, Gary Mendell, has gone a step further, not only identifying eight core standards he believes are key to any successful treatment program, but also launching a treatment quality rating system. This is uncharted area in the treatment sector, and I look forward to hearing from him about the progress he's made since founding his nonprofit, Shatterproof, the obstacles he's faced along the way, and the challenges that remain to the successful use of such a rating system.

We're here today because too many Americans have lost too many loved ones to addiction and overdose deaths. America's opioid crisis has left a trail of broken hearts and homes across the country. We're here to help communities get on the path towards health and wellness. Millions of Americans are desperately seeking a path forward. Working together, we can save tax dollars and save lives. Thank you to our witnesses today for helping us examine best practices and take a look at what works -- and what doesn't work -- to help get Americans on the road to recovery.