

United States Senate

April 6, 2022

Dr. Rahul Gupta
Director
White House Office of National Drug Control Policy
1800 G St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Director Gupta:

I write to express my continued and growing concern regarding the rise in drug overdose deaths, and in particular the increasing trend in methamphetamine (“meth”) misuse and meth-related deaths. Now more than ever is the time to shift our national strategy away from failed “Drug War” policies of the past, and to focus on reducing misuse and deaths by increasing access to treatment and harm reduction efforts. I urge the administration to develop a national plan to address the meth epidemic that prioritizes evidence-based and culturally-informed responses to meth misuse in states and communities hardest hit by this crisis.

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention underscores a disturbing trend and grim milestone in our nation’s history—more than 100,000 lives have been lost due to drug overdose in a period of just 12 months.¹ In particular, meth-involved overdose deaths have skyrocketed in recent years. A study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that meth-involved overdose deaths in the United States tripled from 2015 to 2019 among people ages 18-64.² Native communities continue to bear the brunt of the meth epidemic, as American Indians and Alaska Natives experience among the highest rates of meth use as well as the greatest increases in meth-related overdose deaths.³

This meth epidemic has been affecting certain communities across our country more harshly than others. For example, meth misuse has hit Hawaii particularly hard for many years. Hawaii’s meth-related death rate has been above the national meth-related death rate for the last decade, and the state reported nearly 200 deaths as a result of psychostimulants with misuse potential in just a one year period through June 2021.⁴ This is a concerning trend, not just in Hawaii but in communities all across the country.

¹ FB Ahmad, LM Rossen, P Sutton, “Provisional drug overdose death counts,” *National Center for Health Statistics*, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² “Methamphetamine-involved overdose deaths nearly tripled between 2015 to 2019, NIH study finds,” *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/news-events/news-releases/2021/09/methamphetamine-involved-overdose-deaths-nearly-tripled-between-2015-to-2019-nih-study-finds>

³ Ibid.

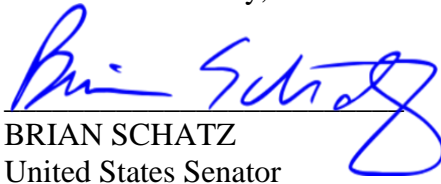
⁴ Ahmad, Rossen, Sutton, “Provisional drug overdose death counts,” <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.

We must address the persistent and growing meth epidemic with the urgency it requires. That is why a comprehensive plan to combat meth misuse should be a central component of the administration's national plan to confront the overdose crisis. In 2019, I urged the previous administration to include a focus on meth misuse in the National Drug Control Strategy and to ensure that the National Drug Control Strategy Performance Reporting System outlined meth-related goals and objectives, such as reducing the rate of meth-related deaths and meth use among young people.⁵ Unfortunately, the 2020 National Drug Control Strategy did not include a sufficient focus on meth to meet this crisis head-on.

However, I am encouraged by the Biden-Harris Administration's policy priorities to reduce overdoses and to save lives, including ramping up access to evidence-based treatment and harm reduction efforts.⁶ Confronting the meth epidemic should be thoroughly integrated in this framework, and the National Drug Control Strategy should reflect this in its goals and objectives. The Office of National Drug Control Policy should also recognize meth as a national emerging drug threat that requires immediate attention.

We must address the meth epidemic with the immediate attention and urgency required. I appreciate the administration's continued commitment on this front, and I look forward to your response on this important matter.

Sincerely,


BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator

⁵ "Schatz Calls for More Federal Resources To Fight Meth Abuse As Death Rate From Meth Grows In Hawaii," *Senator Brian Schatz*, <https://www.schatz.senate.gov/news/press-releases/schatz-calls-for-more-federal-resources-to-fight-meth-abuse-as-death-rate-from-meth-grows-in-hawaii>.

⁶ "The Biden-Harris Administration's Statement of Drug Policy Priorities for Year One," *Executive Office of the President-Office National Drug Control Policy*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BidenHarris-Statement-of-Drug-Policy-Priorities-April-1.pdf>.