

United States Senate

December 13, 2019

The Honorable James W. Carroll
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
750 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Carroll:

As the federal government responds to current drug misuse and addiction crises, it is imperative that we also prevent and mitigate additional threats before they reach the level of an epidemic. To that end, I urge you to incorporate responses to the misuse of methamphetamines (or “meth”)—including misuses of legally prescribed meth as well as illicit forms such as crystal meth—explicitly in the next National Drug Control Strategy developed by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). In addition, to assessing progress on reducing meth-related misuse, addiction, and death, meth-related goals should be clearly outlined in ONDCP’s National Drug Control Strategy Performance Reporting System.

Meth misuse and addiction are serious and growing national problems. There were four times as many deaths in 2017 as in 2012—2,600 deaths in 2012 to 10,300 in 2017.ⁱ Over that time period, 17 states bore the brunt of the increase in meth-related deaths, with the steepest increases in Ohio (130%) and West Virginia (94%).ⁱⁱ In addition, within this growing number of meth-related deaths, Native Americans and Alaska Natives had the highest death rate and the biggest rate increase.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, as meth is less likely than opioids to lead to an acute overdose, statistics on meth-related deaths may underestimate the prevalence of meth misuse and addiction.

Meth misuse and addiction have been consistent problems in my state of Hawaii for decades, but over the past decade, meth-related deaths have risen dramatically, from 37 deaths in 2009 to 147 in 2018.^{iv} The number of deaths due to meth overtook the number of both prescription drug- and opioid-related deaths in 2015, and has spiked since then.^v Over the past decade, Hawaii’s meth-related death rate has been above the national meth-related death rate. In 2016, Hawaii had 6.8 meth-related deaths per 100,000 Hawaii residents—compared to the national rate of 2.4 per 100,000 people.^{vi}

These high meth-related death rates are not limited to Hawaii. West Virginia and Alaska have both experienced high meth-related death rates—14 deaths per 100,000 people in West Virginia and 9 deaths per 100,000 people in Alaska.^{vii} Importantly, meth-related deaths are increasing faster than opioid-related deaths at the start of the opioid overdose epidemic. While opioid-related deaths quadrupled in the first decade of the opioid epidemic—from 3,400 deaths in 1999 to 13,500 deaths in 2009—meth-related deaths quadrupled in half the time—from 2,600 deaths in 2012 to 10,300 in 2017.^{viii}

This has alarming implications for our national drug control policies. Some of the strategy's goals mention meth as an example of an illegal substance that the federal government will interdict. This is not enough to target meth within the strategy's overall goals of preventing misuse, treating addiction, and reducing the availability of illicit drugs in the country. As ONDCP, along with your partner federal agencies, responds to the opioid overdose epidemic, it is imperative that you also prioritize efforts to stem and reduce meth misuse, addiction, and deaths. For example, ONDCP's strategy outlines prevention as an objective, focusing on both universal and specific interventions to target risk factors and stop drug misuse before it begins.^{ix} Such preventive measures should specifically address communities that are seeing an uptick in meth misuse and addiction. Furthermore, ONDCP's Performance Reporting System should outline meth-related goals and objectives, such as reducing the rate of past year meth-related deaths, as well as misuse among the youth population.^x

By specifically targeting the growing problems of meth misuse and addiction, we can effectively prevent them from becoming a more serious crisis. And for communities, such as Hawaii, that are facing escalating problems of meth misuse, addiction, and death, concerted federal interventions will help to reduce the number of deaths and serious harm from misuse and addiction. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator

ⁱ Christine Vestal, "Cheap and powerful 'meth 2.0' is ravaging communities and slowly killing its victims," *USA Today*, 2 Nov. 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/11/02/meth-use-surges-stronger-cheaper-drugs-imported-mexico/4124765002/>.

ⁱⁱ Christine Vestal, "As the Opioid Crisis Peaks, Meth and Cocaine Deaths Explode," *Stateline: The Pew Charitable Trust*, 13 May 2019, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/05/13/as-the-opioid-crisis-peaks-meth-and-cocaine-deaths-explode>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} Eleni Gill, "Meth deaths Soar in Hawaii Even As Opioids Grab Public Attention," *Honolulu Civil Beat*, 12 Nov. 2019, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/11/meth-deaths-soar-in-hawaii-even-as-opioids-grab-public-attention/>.

^v *Ibid.*

^{vi} Gill, "Meth deaths Soar in Hawaii."

^{vii} Vestal, "As the Opioid Crisis Peaks."

^{viii} Christine Vestal, "As Meth Use Surges, One Region Tries to Combat 'The Pull,'" *Stateline: The Pew Charitable Trust*, 1 Nov. 2019, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/11/01/as-meth-use-surges-one-region-tries-to-combat-the-pull>.

^{ix} "National Drug Control Strategy" Office of National Drug Control Policy, Jan. 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/NDCS-Final.pdf>.

^x "National Drug Control Strategy: Performance Reporting System," Office of National Drug Control Policy, May 2019, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ONDCP_PR.S.pdf.