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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

### COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-3641

Minority (202) 225-2927

March 19, 2024

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
United States Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) examine how the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has managed COVID-19 supplemental funding, as well as new funds provided to launch the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988 Program). According to SAMHSA's budget overview, SAMHSA's annual budget authority for fiscal year 2021 was \$5.8 billion, but it also received more than \$7.8 billion in additional money through the COVID-19 supplemental funding.<sup>1</sup> Like other federal and state government agencies, SAMHSA quickly has had to manage priorities and oversee this influx of money to address challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental health conditions—such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and schizophrenia—affect a substantial number of adults in the United States. For example, in 2020, SAMHSA estimated that 53 million adults in the United States (21 percent) had a mental illness, including approximately 14 million adults (5.6 percent) who had serious mental illness.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the governmental response to the pandemic—such as increased social isolation, stress, and unemployment—have intensified concerns that more people are affected by mental health conditions and that people with underlying mental health conditions could experience increased severity of those conditions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2023, <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa-fy-2023-cj.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, (Rockville, Md.: October 2021). <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2020-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Mental Health Care: Access Challenges for Covered Consumers and Relevant Federal Efforts*, GAO-22-104597, 1 (March 2022), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104597.pdf>

Last year, we requested that SAMHSA provide a full accounting for the influx of funding it received. SAMHSA's response showed that it had obligated most of this funding—\$8.2 billion in COVID-19 supplemental funding and over \$850 million for the 988 Program as of November 2023—primarily through grants to states and other grantees. However, SAMHSA's response also shows that the states and other grantees had used less than half of these obligated amounts by that date. In light of this, we have concerns about the nature and pace of using these funds, as well as SAMHSA's ability to administer and oversee this additional funding.

Therefore, we request that GAO examine the following questions:

1. To what extent have states and other grantees used SAMHSA's COVID-19 supplemental funding allocated to grants, and funding for the 988 Program?
2. What information does SAMHSA collect on how states and other grantees have used this grant funding?
3. What factors have affected states' and other grantees' ability to use these funds?
4. What information is available on how states and other grantees will use any remaining funds?
5. How has this additional grant funding affected SAMHSA's administration and oversight, and what adjustments, if any, has SAMHSA made to accommodate the influx?

If you have any questions, please contact Majority Committee staff at (202) 225-3641. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Chair  
Committee on Energy and  
Commerce



H. Morgan Griffith  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



Brett Guthrie  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Health

CC: Frank Pallone Jr., Ranking Member, Energy and Commerce Committee  
Anna Eshoo, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health  
Kathy Castor, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Attachment