

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2017

Brenda Fitzgerald, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald,

The most recent national data shows that approximately 30 million Americans are affected by an eating disorder during their lifetimes.¹ Yet, this data was collected more than ten years ago, and some analyses suggest that the patterns of these disorders and the populations affected have shifted since that time. Unfortunately, the national data needed to fully understand the prevalence and trends of this disease and to improve prevention and treatment efforts do not currently exist. Accordingly, we urge you to consider including questions related to eating disorders in Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) national surveillance surveys to help improve the lives of people affected by these deadly conditions.

Improving data collection on eating disorders is particularly important given the high mortality rates and evolving characteristics of certain types of eating disorders. For example, one type of eating disorder, anorexia nervosa, has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness.² Increased hospitalizations for eating disorders and increased prevalence among men indicate that this public health issue is growing in significance and affecting new populations.³

CDC conducts numerous national surveys that inform the response to public health threats. The data collected by CDC is an extremely valuable resource for researchers and public health officials across the country. CDC surveys provide a particularly effective opportunity to detect, track, and assess community-level public health issues. For instance, CDC surveys have recently helped identify key community-level issues related to the opioid epidemic, Zika virus, and cancer.⁴

The CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, a survey completed by high school students and designed to “monitor priority health risk behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States,” included five

¹ Hudson, Hiripi, Pope & Kessler, “The prevalence and correlates of eating disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication,” *Biological Psychiatry*, 61(3), 348-358 (2007) (online at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16815322>).

² Arcelus, Mitchell, Wales & Nielsen, “Mortality rates in patients with anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. A meta-analysis of 36 studies.” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 68(7), 724-731 (2011) (online at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21727255>).

³ Zhao & Encinosa, “Hospitalizations for Eating Disorders from 1999 to 2006,” *Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project* (April 2009) (online at: <https://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb70.pdf>); Marsh, Sarah, “Eating disorders in men rise by 70% in NHS figures,” *The Guardian* (July 31, 2017) (online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/31/eating-disorders-in-men-rise-by-70-in-nhs-figures>).

⁴ “Opioid prescribing is still high and varies widely throughout the U.S.,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (July 6, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p0706-opioid.html>); “About 1 in 10 U.S. pregnant women with confirmed Zika infection had a fetus or baby with birth defects in 2016,” *CDC* (April 4, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p0404-zika-pregnancy.html>); “New CDC Report shows deaths from cancer higher in rural America,” *CDC* (July 6, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p0706-rural-cancer-deaths.html>).

questions about body weight until 2015.⁵ These questions addressed fasting, diet pills, vomiting, and laxatives.⁶ While states still have the option of including these questions in their surveys and a number of state grantees continue to collect data on some of these topics, eating disorder surveillance should be more consistent and comprehensive across the country.

We are concerned that none of CDC's national surveys currently include questions regarding eating disorders. For example, questions about eating disorders are not included in CDC's National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which is "designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States."⁷ These questions would be critical to helping researchers and practitioners understand the early signs and symptoms that may be associated with the development of eating disorders, identify regions or communities that are disproportionately affected by eating disorders, and determine whether specific groups – such as veterans or military families – that may need specialized prevention efforts and treatments are being overlooked.

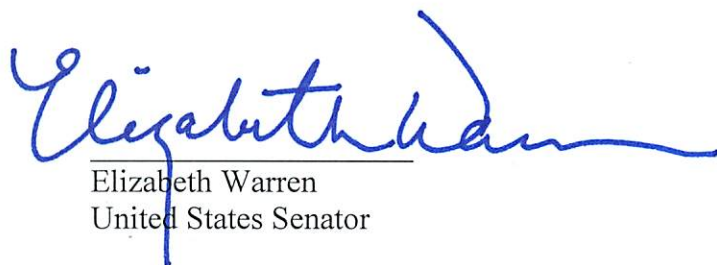
We urge you to consider including eating disorder-related questions in these surveys and to examine how to expand CDC's other survey instruments to ask about eating disorders. We also request that CDC expand its efforts to educate and provide technical assistance to states about the importance of data collection on eating disorders. We would appreciate a written response by Friday, November 17, 2017.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



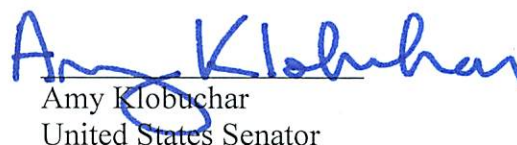
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⁵ 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (online at: ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/data/yrbs/2013/2013_xhx_questionnaire.pdf); "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) Overview," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (last updated Aug. 9, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/overview.htm>).

⁶ 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (online at: ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/data/yrbs/2013/2013_xhx_questionnaire.pdf); "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) Overview," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (last updated Aug. 9, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/overview.htm>).

⁷ "National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (last updated Aug. 30, 2017) (online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/index.htm>).



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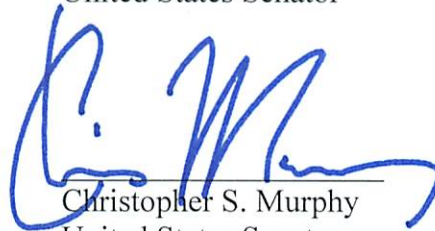
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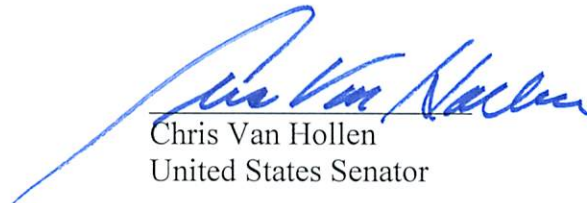
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