

March 22, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

Thank you for your efforts to address the humanitarian disaster unfolding due to Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. As organizations that believe that mental health and physical health must not be artificially separated, we write to strongly urge the State Department and USAID to integrate mental health and substance use into the United States' relief efforts. We further encourage the U.S. Government (USG) to coordinate closely with our worldwide partners, including UN member nations, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and numerous non-governmental organizations, to help address the inevitable mental health and substance use needs caused and exacerbated by the invasion.

Prioritizing these needs is especially important for Ukrainians living with mental health and substance use disorders (MH/SUD). The invasion has severely disrupted access to treatment both inside Ukraine and for many of the 3 million refugees who have fled the country. Barriers include clinicians and patients not being able to reach health facilities, large disruptions to medication supply chains, the loss of medical and travel documents, individuals' lack of financial resources, and interruptions in harm reduction programs such as sterile syringe exchange programs.

We urge the State Department and USAID to act urgently with partners to help overcome these barriers. Continued access to treatment, including medications such as anti-psychotics, anti-convulsants, anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medications and medications to treat substance use disorders, is essential. There is also a great need to arrange for mental health professionals (and necessary translation services) to prevent treatment disruption wherever possible. Such disruptions will only add to the suffering being experienced by individuals with MH/SUD and their families and may quickly lead to worsening symptoms and put individual lives at risk.

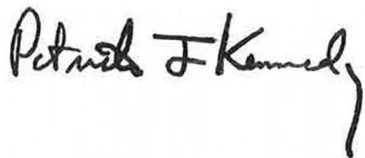
In addition, the invasion is certain to increase mental health needs among Ukrainians more broadly regardless of whether they were previously receiving MH/SUD treatment. We urge the State Department and USAID to work collaboratively with governmental and non-governmental partners to expand screenings for MH/SUD needs among refugees and to arrange for appropriate services.

We applaud steps being taken by the international community to help Ukrainian refugees continue treatment for other illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS and cancer, and call for parity in response for MH/SUD, which historically have been an afterthought in global crisis response.

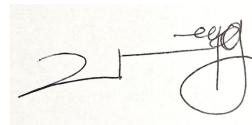
We welcome steps in the right direction that the USG has already taken such as funding a UNODC-WHO Stop-Overdose-Safety (S-O-S) project in Ukraine¹ and participating in a recent event on addressing substance use in humanitarian settings.² However, it is imperative that the USG do more. Indeed, we note that USAID’s website highlights many global public health priorities but not MH/SUD and that discussions of SUDs are primarily through the lens of HIV/AIDS prevention, which, while essential, leave the impression that preventing and treating SUDs are not a priority. Furthermore, we note that the recent USAID fact sheet on the USG’s significant humanitarian response to the invasion of Ukraine fails to address mental health.³

Thank you again for the State Department and USAID’s tireless efforts to help the Ukrainian people. We stand ready to assist any way we can to address the enormous MH/SUD needs associated with the unfolding disaster.

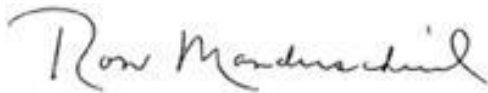
Sincerely,



Patrick J. Kennedy
Former U.S. Representative
Founder, The Kennedy Forum



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President
American Academy of Child and Adolescent
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Ron Manderscheid
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¹ UNODC-WHO Stop-Overdose-Safely (S-O-S) project implementation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine: summary report. World Health Organization and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; 2021. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/340497/9789240022454-eng.pdf>.

² 65th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Brochure for “Leaving no one behind: Addressing substance use in humanitarian settings.” WHO, New York NGO Committee on Drugs, and Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs; March 16, 2022. https://www.unodc.org/res/commissions/CND/session/65_Session_2022/wed_16_march_side_event_html/Humanitarian_Brochure.pdf.

³ “Ukraine – Complex Emergency.” USAID; Fact Sheet #5, March 11, 2022. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2022-03-11_USG_Ukraine_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_5.pdf



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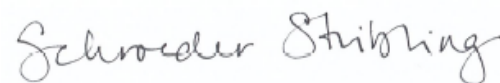
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