

## **The Strengthening Communities of Recovery**

Senators Lujan and Cornyn

The United States is grappling with a severe behavioral health crisis, exacerbated by an epidemic of substance use disorders (SUD). As individuals take on these challenges and fight the hard fight through treatment into recovery, they face a myriad of challenges, often struggling to reintegrate into society due to stigma, lack of support, and limited access to resources that address their complex needs. The path to recovery is not linear and is marked by unique difficulties that necessitate sustained, multifaceted support services. **The Strengthening Communities of Recovery Act** seeks to reauthorize and expand resources for individuals with lived experience with substance use disorder.

SUD represents a significant public health challenge in the United States. In 2021, over 37.3 million Americans aged 12 and older were currently using illicit drugs, with 59.2 million or 21.4% having used illegal drugs or misused prescription drugs within the last year. Despite the high prevalence of substance use, the availability of recovery services is not keeping pace. Of the more than 46 million Americans with a substance use disorder in 2021, which represents 16.5% of the population, only 6% received treatment. For those individuals who battled their SUD, and worked hard to reach the other side, access to recovery services is tragically limited.

Bolstering recovery services is critical, as they provide essential support for individuals striving to rebuild their lives after SUD. Recovery services extend beyond individual treatment; they encompass support for families and communities affected by the repercussions of substance use disorders. These services are imperative not only for the well-being of individuals in recovery but also for the health of communities, facilitating reintegration and reducing the likelihood of relapse. Recovery services also play a pivotal role in harm reduction and public health.

**The Strengthening Communities of Recovery Act** addresses the dire need for recovery services by reauthorizing this grant program for five years and increasing funding for this program from \$5 million a year to \$16 million a year. The grant program allows organizations to develop and enhance peer recovery and general recovery support, while also fostering collaboration with other harm reduction entities. Grant funding, ranging from \$250,000 to \$300,000, is allocated to enable these organizations to offer a number of services, including advocacy, education, employment assistance, and outreach to families and communities. By supporting organizations that provide these critical services, the bill aims to create a more robust support system for individuals in recovery, contributing to healthier communities and more effective public health outcomes.

For example, the Northern Illinois Recovery Community reported that in 2022, the first year they were awarded the grant, they had 400 individuals attend recovery-focused events; 324 individuals had enhanced recovery outcomes through peer recovery support services; 300 individuals and families received free NARCAN units; and 300 individuals participated in trainings like Grief Recovery, Mental Health First, and Anger Management.

The continued support and funding for these organizations help ensure that they are able to continue providing services to prevent, treat, and support the recovery of people with substance use disorders as well as their families and communities.