



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Lauri Cole, NYS Council: 518-461-8200,

lauri@nyscouncil.org

Joy Burwell, National Council for Behavioral Health: 202-748-8789,

joyb@thenationalcouncil.org

**NYS COUNCIL AND NATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORT TONKO'S EFFORTS
TO FIGHT NATIONAL OPIOID AND HEROIN EPIDEMIC**

ALBANY, NY (January 12, 2018) – The NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the National Council for Behavioral Health, and nearly 70 other national, state and regional associations and New York State health care providers, support the Addiction Treatment Access Improvement Act (H.R. 3692), which strengthens language to expand prescriber thresholds for the life-saving medication-assisted treatment (MAT) buprenorphine.

Our country is experiencing a health care crisis. Communities across the nation are fighting for their lives against the devastating opioid and heroin epidemic. Overdoses are now the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S., claiming over *175 lives every day*. Despite outcomes that have shown that access to MAT is effective for treating opioid addiction and saving lives, access to these treatments is heavily restricted.

“Individuals in New York, and across the country, face critical access to care issues that hinder them from getting the medication-assisted treatment they need, when they need it, and when they are ready for it. There is a very short window of time between saving a life and losing one to the opioid and heroin epidemic. Our workforce and agencies need to have the ability to provide these life-saving medication-assisted treatments, without being hindered by regulations that limit our ability to respond when an individual is ready to accept help,” said Lauri Cole, executive director of the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.

Health care professionals can currently prescribe addictive narcotics without restrictions, yet burdensome restrictions are placed on prescribing practices for the interventions that effectively treat opioid addiction. We support Congressman Paul Tonko’s efforts to expand the list of qualified practitioners who can apply to increase the number of patients to whom they can prescribe buprenorphine. However, we need this legislation to go even further. Currently, new prescribers can only prescribe for 30 people in their first year of certification. Following that first year, only physicians can apply to increase their limit up to 275 people, while other qualified practitioners like nurse practitioners and physician assistants have a 100-patient cap. Nurse practitioners and physicians Assistants are highly qualified, vital parts of health care teams and should have the ability to prescribe to a greater number of patients.

“Now is the time for Congress to fight this epidemic. The Addiction Treatment Access Improvement Act is a step in the right direction, but we encourage them to take it one step further and include language that would allow all qualified prescribers to increase their patient threshold to 275. Raising the patient limit for all qualified prescribers would significantly improve access to this effective, evidence-based treatment to more individuals suffering from addiction to opioids,” said Linda Rosenberg, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health.

###

About the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

The NYS Council is a statewide non-profit membership association representing the interests of 100 behavioral health (mental health and substance use) prevention, treatment and recovery organizations across New York.

About the National Council for Behavioral Health

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America’s health care organizations that deliver mental health and addictions treatment and services. Together with our 2,900 member organizations serving over 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery. The National Council introduced [Mental Health First Aid USA](#) and more than 1 million Americans have been trained.