



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**
SERVICES, INC.

March 12, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I write to urge the Committee to report the nomination of Dr. Vivek H. Murthy as Surgeon General of the United States swiftly and favorably to the full Senate. APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States with nearly 122,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as members. Our mission is to advance the creation, communication, and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.

Dr. Murthy is uniquely qualified to serve as Surgeon General at this moment in our nation's history, given both his years of experience leading public health programs and his substantial expertise on the major public health challenges facing our country: COVID-19 and other viral diseases; opioid and other substance use disorders; mental health problems and social isolation; and health disparities. As a member of the President's COVID-19 Response Team, Dr. Murthy has helped coordinate the federal response to the pandemic and ensure that the negative mental health impacts of the pandemic are not forgotten. According to our recent Stress in America™ survey, people are experiencing more stress now than compared to any point during 2020, with 80 percent of respondents reporting the coronavirus pandemic is a significant source of stress in their lives. This was particularly acute among essential workers, who were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder since the beginning of the pandemic.¹ Dr. Murthy recognizes these realities and will be able to use the position of Surgeon General to address the growing mental health challenges facing the nation and the long-lasting effects of the pandemic in the years to come.

¹ American Psychological Association (2021). Stress in America: January 2021 Stress Snapshot. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2021/stress-snapshot-january.pdf>.

During his previous tenure as Surgeon General, Dr. Murthy dedicated significant time and energy to addressing the opioid epidemic, issuing the first ever Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health, and launching a national campaign to educate providers and the public about the importance of safe prescribing of opioids. Dr. Murthy has also been an outspoken proponent of addressing the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the well-being of individuals and communities. Research has shown that the effects of loneliness and isolation can be as damaging to health as other well-known risk factors, such as obesity and smoking.

Dr. Murthy recognizes the importance of suicide prevention and is willing to take a stand to protect the lives of those most at risk for suicide, including our nation's veterans. Approximately 60 percent of all firearm deaths in the U.S. are suicides, and suicide attempts using a firearm are the most likely to be fatal.² Veterans are more greatly impacted by firearm suicide, which accounts for nearly 70 percent of veteran suicide deaths.³ During his previous tenure as Surgeon General, Dr. Murthy played a critical role in securing funding for research on firearm suicide prevention. Recently, to further address the issue of veteran suicide in particular, President Trump established the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) Task Force. The Task Force report included a recommendation to increase implementation of programs focused on lethal means safety, including increased access to safe storage and training for providers in firearm suicide prevention.⁴ Dr. Murthy's work in this extremely critical area, including a partnership with the Veterans Health Administration while Surgeon General, will be important in continuing to make strides to mitigate death by suicide.

Finally, Dr. Murthy has demonstrated a commitment to prevention and health improvement for all populations. Throughout his career, he has remained dedicated to addressing the health disparities that have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Murthy understands that economic inequality, discrimination, stigma, and other social determinants of health are among the root causes of disparities we see among racial and ethnic minorities' access to health care services. As these populations continue to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, Dr. Murthy's efforts to improve access to care and eliminate health disparities will be more important than ever for our nation.

In closing, we would like to thank you in advance for your serious consideration of Dr. Murthy for Surgeon General. Dr. Murthy is a well-respected public health expert whose decades of

² National Institutes of Health, Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research. (2020, September 30). *NIH awards grants for firearm injury and mortality prevention research* [Press Release]. <https://obssr.od.nih.gov/niha-awards-grants-for-firearm-injury-and-mortality-prevention-research/>

³ Department of Veterans Affairs 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. (2020). <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-11-2020-508.pdf>.

⁴ PREVENTS: The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide. (2021). The PREVENTS Roadmap. <https://www.va.gov/PREVENTS/docs/PRE-007-The-PREVENTS-Roadmap-1-2-508.pdf>

expertise are vitally needed as the nation faces a once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis. We urge the Committee move quickly to favorably refer Dr. Murthy's nomination to the full Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. C. Evans Jr.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD
Chief Executive Officer