



April 20, 2021

To: Members of the Advisory Committee for a Resilient Nevada
From: Natalie Kotkin, Senior Policy Manager, Unite Us; natalie.kotkin@uniteus.com
Subject: Comments on “Nevada Resiliency Fund: Opioid Needs Assessment”

Dear Advisory Committee members,

I am pleased to share Unite Us’ comments on Mercer’s Final Draft Needs Assessment. The opioid epidemic is a crisis for Nevada and funding from various opioid settlements creates a unique opportunity to address both the proximate and root causes of the crisis. **To reduce the burden of opioid use disorder (OUD)-associated morbidity and mortality, Unite Us recommends leveraging infrastructure to address individual-level risk factors for OUD including social determinants of health and co-occurring physical and behavioral health conditions and to track progress on addressing racial, ethnic and other disparities related to addiction.**

Founded in 2013, Unite Us is a technology company that connects health and social care through innovative communications software, interactive datasets, and an on-the-ground, community-centered approach. Through our coordinated care networks, Unite Us seeks to increase equitable access to health and social services, address the fragmentation of services that makes our health and social systems challenging to navigate, and confront barriers to health equity such as poverty, lack of access, racism, and discrimination. Our diverse range of stakeholders include community based organizations, health plans, health systems, hospitals, and government entities and public programs. Unite Us has successfully built and scaled coordinated care networks in 44 states across the country, including North Carolina, Oklahoma, Illinois, Virginia, California, and New York.

Emphasizing the range of factors that contribute to addiction

Unite Us applauds how the Final Draft Needs Assessment discusses the broad range of the system- and individual-level risk factors for opioid addiction, and in particular the co-occurring health and social needs that many individuals with OUD have. As multiple local studies cited in the Final Draft Needs Assessment demonstrate, many individuals with OUD have needs including housing, transportation, employment, and food insecurity that intersect with their addiction and make engaging in treatment difficult. At Unite Us, we recognize that individuals with substance use disorders are often stigmatized and reluctant to seek services, compounding negative impacts on their health and quality of life. We also know that an effective recovery support system cannot exist without a robust network of community partners and the infrastructure in place to support personalized, coordinated care.

Furthermore, Nevada cannot fully address the opioid crisis in the state without acknowledging, measuring and committing to address disparities including differences in access to treatment and fatal overdose rates across racial, ethnic and other groups. For example, Hispanic individuals were the only racial / ethnic group to see a statistically significant increase in fatal overdoses from 2019 to 2020. Disparities also exist along urban / rural lines, as all 15 of the state’s Opioid Treatment Programs are in Clark and Washoe Counties. These findings argue for not just expanding treatment and wrap-around



support, but also tracking to ensure that expanded services improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

Opportunities to improve access to and coordination of care

As the Advisory Committee considers how to address the needs identified in the Final Draft Needs Assessment, we encourage you to consider tools that increase access to health and social care and coordination of services. Platforms like Unite Us support long-term treatment and recovery for individuals struggling with opioid use or a substance use disorder at any stage of recovery and within their personal journey. Our shared community infrastructure allows clinicians, therapists, care coordinators, and human service providers to work together to:

- **Maintain client dignity and privacy** by utilizing protected viewing permissions that ensure 42 CFR Part 2 compliance and that only those providing substance use services to the client can see the details of their care history.
- **Increase access to resources by rooting Unite Us in the community** so that faith-based organizations, barbershops, salons, and trusted members of the community can send referrals on behalf of those seeking services.
- **Address substance use holistically by hosting a diverse range of organizations and programs that meet clients where they are.** Programs and providers may include harm reduction agencies, outpatient clinics, inpatient treatment programs, needle exchange programs, overdose prevention classes, and group support.
- **Develop individualized treatment plans** that reflect a client's personal journey and incorporate clinical care and wraparound services such as vocational training, housing, counseling, and education.
- **Connect clients to mental and behavioral health services** and coordinate with specialists who can address any psychological and/or emotional concerns.
- **Promote the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs like Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)** and peer recovery support services.
- **Strengthen community capacity building through outcome data** that can identify co-occurring service gaps, such as a lack of hospital beds or limited food security resources in specific geographies. This data can also be leveraged to further expand federal, private, and philanthropic funding to address the opioid crisis in communities.

We have already begun to offer these resources locally through our Unite Nevada network, which launched in November 2021 and is already supporting many health and social care institutions in the state. In addition, our end-to-end solution can help to **identify** individuals with the greatest health and social risks, **enroll** them in treatment and other services, and **measure** progress at an individual and community level. Our **Social Care Payments** tool can facilitate payment to organizations receiving funding through the Fund for a Resilient Nevada and ensure robust, streamlined tracking of the services being funded with those dollars.



The opioid epidemic has created individual and community suffering in Nevada, especially for groups who were already vulnerable or marginalized. However, the Fund for a Resilient Nevada creates an opportunity to not just expand access to prevention, treatment, and harm reduction resources, but also to establish infrastructure that can help address the broader health and social conditions contributing to the epidemic and improve health equity across the state.