**Sample Op-Ed for Impaired Driving Prevention Month**

**Impaired Driving Is on the Rise Again; Here’s What We Can Do About It**

After years of steady decline, impaired driving fatalities are on the rise. 2020 was the most dangerous year on the road in over a decade, despite an historic decrease in the number of drivers. As people returned to their cars in 2021, impaired driving fatalities rose another 14%. This trend is driven in large part by individuals impacted by substance use. To reverse course, we must adopt approaches that target their behavior and connect accountability with the appropriate level of treatment and supervision.

Better screening and assessment can identify individuals likely to repeat impaired driving and ensure that they receive enhanced supervision and evidence-based treatment. For the majority, an arrest for impaired driving is a huge wake-up call and many will never receive another offense. But without outside intervention, others will continue to repeat their behavior. According to the National Institutes of Health, repeat impaired drivers commonly suffer from mental health and substance use disorders, and left untreated, they are statistically the most dangerous drivers on the road. Early screening for all impaired drivers can help identify those at risk for repeating their behavior, ensuring that they receive an appropriate clinical or behavioral response.

For over two decades, treatment courts in the U.S. have proven that a combination of treatment and accountability can lead people into recovery, reduce crime, and save resources. Impaired driving treatment courts (or DWI courts) focus on impaired drivers assessed as having a substance use disorder and are therefore likely to drive impaired again. Participants are supervised closely with mandated home visits, frequent alcohol and drug testing, and regular appearances in court. But participants in the program also undergo rigorous, evidence-based, individualized treatment. They receive assistance with employment, education, and other barriers to successful recovery. Researchon this combination of accountability and treatment shows that impaired driving treatment courts are the most successful way to reduce impaired driving, decreasing recidivism by as much as 60%.

Used in conjunction with clinical assessment and appropriate treatment interventions that target individual needs, technology can support effective impaired driving responses. Many states support ignition interlock, though they remain underutilized by local communities. Ignition interlock works best when woven into a broader strategy for impaired driving; it requires users to pass a breath test before their car will start and has been found to reduce repeat impaired driving by about two-thirds. Continuous alcohol monitoring (CAM) technology is an effective tool that ensures compliance with supervision requirements by relaying real-time alcohol consumption data to law enforcement. Research has found that the use of CAM can be a more effective approach to monitoring use than urine testing. With the consistent presence of polysubstance use with this population, it is also imperative we test for drugs on a regular basis.

The circumstances that lead to every impaired driving crash are unique. No single approach can work because no two impaired drivers are the same. The most effective strategy combines early intervention with an evidence-based response targeting behavior. Soon, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will release the next round of annual impaired driving statistics. While we can’t predict the data, we know they will tell the story of too many lost lives and shattered families. And we know too much about what works to end this devastation not to act.