



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

5600 Fishers Lane • Rockville, MD 20857

www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)



August 28, 2020

Dear State Authority for Mental and Substance Use Disorders:

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented States with several challenges in their efforts to implement the Synar program, which monitors the sale and distribution of tobacco products to minors. Synar inspections are carried out each year by youth inspectors, who visit retail establishments and attempt to purchase tobacco products. Recognizing the importance of keeping the youth inspectors healthy and safe, and in compliance with state and local public health orders, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is providing states with the following guidance on completing their Synar submission for calendar year 2020.

Annual Synar Report Due Date

States are required to submit their annual Synar report by December 31. States are encouraged to make every reasonable attempt to submit their 2020 Annual Synar Report on time, to the best of their ability, including submitting incomplete or partial inspection results. States may describe the challenges they faced due to COVID-19 in Section 3, “Describe any challenges the state faces in complying with the Synar regulation.”

Please note that, in accordance with Public Law 116-94, SAMHSA will not enforce any penalties for non-compliance with the Synar reporting requirement at this time. Therefore, 2020 Annual Synar Reports that are out-of-compliance due to incomplete inspections will not be penalized.

Coverage Study Extensions

Another component of the Synar reporting process is the coverage study, which inventories retail outlets in each state that sells tobacco products. Some states include an in-person component of their coverage studies. SAMHSA understands these in-person studies may have also been hampered by COVID-19 orders.

States may request a one-year coverage study extension from SAMHSA through their Government Project Officer (GPO). To request an extension, states need to provide their GPO with the most recent compliance information, including whether the previous coverage study rate and the retail violation rates are in compliance.

SAMHSA is committed to supporting your state’s efforts to reduce underage tobacco usage, and other substance use and mental health priorities, especially during this challenging time. However, we also want to ensure the safety and well-being of our youth inspectors and other public health professionals. If you have any further questions about completing your Synar

report, please reach out to your GPO, or to Christopher O’Connell, Director of the Division of State Programs, at Christopher.oconnell@samhsa.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elinore F. McCance-Katz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "M".

Elinore F. McCance-Katz, M.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and
Substance Use