

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you begin work on the fiscal year (FY) 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS-Ed) appropriations bill, we urge you to support increased funding for critical prescription drug and opioid abuse prevention, treatment and research programs.

Prescription and illicit drug abuse is an epidemic in the United States that continues to grow at an alarming rate. Drug overdose deaths have skyrocketed in the past decade, largely because of prescription opioids, and they have become the leading cause of injury death in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, drug overdoses caused more deaths than motor vehicle accidents among Americans aged 25 to 64.<sup>2</sup> For each death involving prescription opioids, hundreds of people abuse or misuse these drugs, leading to a staggering increase in hospital visits in the last few years. In addition, addiction to prescription drugs often leads to the use of illicit drugs such as heroin, and as the abuse of prescription drugs has increased, so too has the abuse of heroin.

It is critical that we make a strong commitment to strengthen our nation's efforts to combat this epidemic. While we understand that the Subcommittee is under pressure to limit funding this year, we believe that increased investments are required to adequately respond to the growing drug abuse epidemic. As such, we ask that you support the Administration's requests for increased funding for domestic prescription drug abuse prevention, treatment, and research through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as outlined below.

## **Surveillance and Monitoring at the Centers for Drug Control and Prevention**

Appropriate monitoring of high-risk prescription drugs is critical in identifying people who may misuse as well as high prescribers. We request that you fund drug overdose prevention and monitoring activities at the CDC at a total of \$68.0 million, which is equal to the President's budget request and an increase of \$53.6 million over FY 2015. This would include \$48 million to allow CDC to strengthen and expand the Prescription Drug Overdose (PDO) Prevention for States program to all 50 states. This investment would support states in improving prescription drug monitoring programs, such as interstate interoperability, as well as implementing interventions that exhibit the most promise for reversing the

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Prescription Drug Overdose in the United States: Fact Sheet [online], (2015) Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/overdose/facts.html>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2014) Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>.



PDO epidemic. It would also support data quality and monitoring at a national level, with an emphasis on delivering critical real-time mortality surveillance, as well as CDC's work in developing safe opioid prescribing guidelines for chronic, non-cancer pain in outpatient settings. In addition, \$5.6 million of the total would enable CDC to address the rising rate of heroin-related overdose deaths by working to collect near real-time emergency department data and mortality data by rapidly integrating death certificate and toxicology information. CDC's prescription drug abuse initiatives will align with the work of other federal agencies. For example, CDC will apply its scientific expertise to evaluate SAMHSA's proposed prescription drug overdose grant program.

**Prevention, Treatment and Overdose Reversal at Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration**


Opioid addiction is a treatable disease, and SAMHSA plays a key role in supporting prevention, treatment and recovery programs for people with substance use disorders, including through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant. We urge you to support a total of \$25.1 million, equal to the President's budget request and an increase of \$13.0 million over FY 2015, to support a new initiative at SAMHSA called the Medication-Assisted Treatment for Prescription Drug and Opioid Addiction program to expand treatment for opioid use disorders, with a focus on heroin and prescription opioids through a combination of medication and behavioral therapies services. We also request that you provide an additional \$12 million to fund a new grant program aimed at reducing overdose deaths by helping states purchase naloxone, an important drug recently deployed, to reverse opioid overdose, and educate first responders on its use.

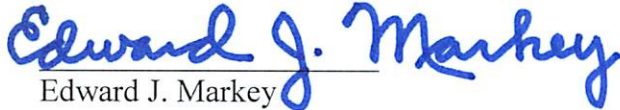
**Alternative Treatment Research at the NIH**

Medical research also plays an important role in reducing prescription drug abuse through discovery of alternative approaches to pain management that pose less risk for dependency or addiction. In collaboration with the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA), the NIH National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) recently began a new initiative funding 13 studies examining non-pharmacological management of pain and other symptoms experienced by military personnel and veterans. As opioid prescribing rates have increased at the VA in recent years, and opioid abuse has risen among young veterans, it is critical that we support research on alternative treatments to ensure the best quality of care for our nation's veterans. As such, we ask that you support the Administration's request of \$54.7 million for extramural clinical research at the NCCIH to ensure continued success of this and other innovative programs.


We sincerely appreciate your consideration of our request and understand the difficult decisions your Subcommittee will face in this fiscal climate. Strengthening our nation's response to the prescription drug and illicit drug abuse epidemic through increased funding in FY 2016 for these critical initiatives at the CDC, SAMHSA and NIH will help reduce deaths and improve our nation's health and safety.

Sincerely,

  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

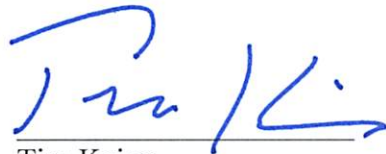
  
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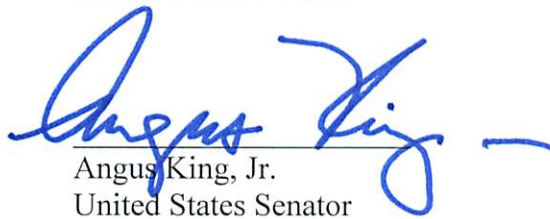
  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

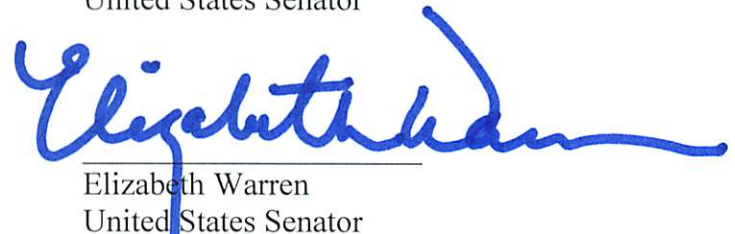
  
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