

February 19, 2015

Dan Crippen, PhD
Executive Director
National Governors Association
Hall of the States
444 N. Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001-1512

Re: American Medical Association, Harm Reduction Coalition and National Safety Council urge increased focus on overdose prevention and treatment

Dear Dr. Crippen

On behalf of the nation's physicians and medical students, leading safety advocates, community leaders, and health care professionals who work every day to promote the health and dignity of individuals and communities impacted by drug use, we write to urge your strong support for turning the nation's discussion about prescription drug abuse and diversion into one that places increased emphasis on overdose prevention and treatment.

The members, advocates and partners of the American Medical Association (AMA), National Safety Council (NSC), Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) and the undersigned organizations, know firsthand the scope and trauma brought by abuse, misuse, overdose and death from opioids. Recently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that deaths involving prescription opioids have declined for the first time in a decade – yet remain unacceptably high at more than 16,000 lives lost annually. However, there has been a substantial increase in deaths from heroin. The CDC recently reported that 8,257 people died of heroin-related deaths in 2013 – a 39 percent increase from 2012 (5,925 deaths). Combined, deaths from heroin and prescription opioids are rising. In other words, at this point, we are unable to say there has been success in preventing death from opioid-related overdose.

The nation's governors know that this national crisis has taken hold in virtually every state in the nation. Through the National Governors Association excellent Policy Academy to Reduce Prescription Drug Abuse, and in many state legislatures, it has become common to view restrictions on prescribing and other mandates as essential. Data show that states that have enacted restrictive measures have seen prescribing rates decrease which is not surprising. Data are not available, however, on the consequences for patients with unmet overdose prevention and addiction treatment needs. What is happening to them?

We acknowledge that the nation's governors are under immense pressure to step in and act. If all they do, however, is restrict supply without addressing demand, deaths from heroin abuse could soon surpass deaths from prescription opioids. That is not just an unintended consequence of restrictive supply-side strategies – it is predictable. Accordingly, we strongly urge the nation's governors to embrace overdose

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prevention and treatment to fully ensure that patients receive the care they need to more fully address the opioid overdose epidemic. We recommend three key policies:

- Enhancing access and utilization of naloxone in every state;
- Providing Good Samaritan protections for those who help victims of overdose; and
- Increasing access to medication assisted treatment services as well as non-opioid based treatments.

Collectively, these three areas can be the cornerstone of an effective demand-side strategy to reduce opioid-related abuse, misuse, overdose and death. States have shown that they can restrict prescription opioids, but the unintended effects of those policies without comparable attention to addiction treatment access have helped lead to the increase in heroin use. No one wants that trend to continue, but without effective demand-side measures, it will.

We also acknowledge that physicians and other prescribers must take charge of this epidemic by carefully examining prescribing practices. Prescribers need to be sure that they are prescribing appropriately and taking necessary precautions, including consulting PDMPs when clinically indicated.

Similarly, we believe that more effective and widespread use of clinically appropriate screening tools can help identify patients at risk for abuse. The most effective care occurs before a problem becomes chronic. Ensuring that the nation's community prevention centers have adequate funding, and providing education throughout a community are additional strategies that can help reduce demand.

We recognize that non-punitive, demand-side strategies require additional resources, are more complicated to effectively implement, and require governors, state legislatures and key stakeholders to be on the same page. Given the trends before us, we believe that we must now take the steps necessary to enhance overdose prevention and treatment. We urge the nation's governors to join us in this life-saving endeavor.

If you have any questions, please contact the AMA's Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954; NSC's Donald Teater, MD, Medical Advisor, Prescription Drug Overdose Initiatives, at don.teater@nsc.org or (828) 734-6211; and HRC's Whitney O'Neill Englander, Government Relations Manager, at englander@harmreduction.org or (626) 808-6923.

Sincerely,

A New PATH
Acacia Network
AIDS Center of Queens County
AIDS Connecticut (ACT)
Medical Association of the State of Alabama
Alaska State Medical Association
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

American Academy of Disability Evaluating Physicians
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery
American Academy of Pain Management
American Academy of Pain Medicine
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
American College of Preventive Medicine
American College of Radiology
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Medical Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Pediatric Surgical Nurses Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
American Society of Dermatopathology
American Society of Echocardiography
American Urological Association
Arizona Medical Association
Arkansas Medical Society
Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse
Baltimore Student Harm Reduction Coalition
Broken No More
California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals
California Hepatitis Alliance
California Medical Association
Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services
Catholic Charities Project Safe Point
Center for Inclusion Health
Chicago Recovery Alliance
CHOW Project
Colorado Medical Society
Community Prevention and Treatment Services
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Connecticut Certification Board
Connecticut State Medical Society
Medical Society of Delaware
Medical Society of the District of Columbia
Cuyahoga County MetroHealth Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone)

Drug Policy Alliance
Drug Policy Forum of Hawaii
Florida Medical Association
Medical Association of Georgia
Grand Rapids Red Project
GRASP, Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing
Harlem United
Harm Reduction Action Center
Harm Reduction Coalition
Harm Reduction Services
Hawaii Medical Association
Heartland Health Outreach, Inc.
HIPS
Homeless Health Care Los Angeles
Idaho Medical Association
Illinois Alcohol and Drug Dependence Association
Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy, Roosevelt- University
Illinois State Medical Society
Indiana State Medical Association
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
Iowa Medical Society
Kansas Medical Society
Kentucky Medical Association
Law Enforcement Against Prohibition
Long Island Minority AIDS Coalition
Los Angeles Community Health Project
Louisiana State Medical Society
Maine Medical Association
MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society
Maryland Addiction Professionals Certification Board
Massachusetts Chapter, Society of Addiction Medicine
Massachusetts Medical Society
Massachusetts Society of Addiction Medicine
Michigan State Medical Society
Minnesota Medical Association
Mississippi State Medical Association
Missouri State Medical Association
MIWhoSoEver
Moms United
Montana Medical Association
National Association of City and County Health Officials
NAMA Recovery of Tennessee
NAMA-Recovery, Delaware Chapter
National Association of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery

National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
Nebraska Medical Association
Nevada State Medical Association
New Hampshire Medical Society
Medical Society of New Jersey
New Mexico Medical Society
Medical Society of the State of New York
New York Harm Reduction Educators
North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
North Carolina Medical Society
North Dakota Medical Association
Northern Nevada HOPES
Ohio State Medical Association
Oklahoma State Medical Association
Open Aid Alliance
Orange County Needle Exchange Program
Oregon Medical Association
Outside In
Pennsylvania Medical Society
People Advocating Recovery in Northern Kentucky
Point Defiance AIDS Projects
Point Defiance AIDS Projects/NASEN
Portsmouth City Health Department
Positive Health Clinic
Prevention Point Pittsburgh
Project DAWN-Deaths Avoided With Naloxone
Project Inform
Project Lazarus
Project SAFE
Rhode Island Medical Society
Society of Critical Care Medicine
Society of Hospital Medicine
Society of Interventional Radiologists
Sonoran Prevention Works
South Carolina Medical Association
South Dakota State Medical Association
Southern Harm Reduction and Drug Policy Network
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
START at Westminster
Suncoast Harm Reduction Project
Tennessee Medical Association
Texas Medical Association
Texas Overdose Naloxone Initiative
The CT Opioid Overdose Workgroup
The McShin Foundation

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The Skeeterhawk Experiment
The Southern Tier AIDS Program
Treatment Communities of America
Trust For America's Health
Utah Medical Association
Vermont Medical Society
Medical Society of Virginia
Vocal NY
Washington Heights CORNER Project
Washington State Medical Association
West Virginia State Medical Association
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wyoming Medical Society
Young People in Recovery