

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](mailto: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](mailto:don.teater@nsc.org) or (828) 734-6211; and HRC's Whitney O'Neill Englander, Government Relations Manager, at [englander@harmreduction.org](mailto: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