

October 2, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to voice our strong support for – and urge your attention to – two recent important actions the Congress has taken, with respect to helping to prevent and reduce overdose fatalities from prescription drugs. First, the Senate Appropriations Committee included overdose prevention language in its FY 2013 Senate Labor-Health and Human Services-Education (LHHS) Appropriations report. Second, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Safety and Innovation Act, signed into the law by the President on July 9th, includes language “to combat the rise in prescription drug abuse and the consequences of such abuse.”

As you know, deaths from unintentional overdose are now at epidemic levels in the United States; yet, currently, there is no federal program or agency tasked with specifically preventing death from overdose, and there is an urgent need for education of health professionals and the public. While other important efforts already are underway, with respect to prescription drug misuse, public and health professional awareness of overdose fatality prevention, currently, is not part of the federal programmatic fabric – a void that must be addressed promptly.

We are eager to work with you and your staff, throughout the agencies in your department, to address this serious public health problem. While not yet enacted, the Senate FY 2013 overdose awareness language illustrates strong Congressional support for a coordinated national overdose public awareness and education campaign. As with many public health challenges, a key first step is increasing awareness of the issue; given the significant and growing problem of overdose deaths, we respectfully ask you not to wait for the FY 2013 LHHS bill to be finalized, but, rather, urge you to take prompt action under your existing authority and discretionary appropriations to commence efforts to help individuals, families, health professionals, and communities to recognize the signs and symptoms of overdose and to know how to respond, so lives can be saved. As part of this important effort, we advocate that information be included regarding naloxone, a safe, effective, and FDA-approved opioid antagonist medication. As you know, the FDA recently held a public workshop regarding access to naloxone, during which the agency heard compelling testimony from individuals, parents, researchers, public health professionals and medical providers about the need to increase access to – and awareness and utilization of – naloxone in the battle against overdose deaths.

In that same vein, in Section 1122 of the new FDA law, you and your colleagues are tasked with reviewing and reporting on current federal initiatives and identifying gaps and opportunities, with respect to ensuring the safe use of prescription drugs with the potential for abuse. As part of this, Congress called for a report that includes information regarding “how best to develop provider, pharmacist, and patient [prescription drug abuse] education tools and a strategy to widely disseminate such tools and assess the efficacy of such tools.” We welcome the

opportunity to work with you and your staff to develop such recommendations and tools and urge that naloxone education and awareness be a specified and fundamental component of such tools and strategies.

Lastly, we would like to take this opportunity to commend your staff for their efforts to promote community-based approaches to this public health crisis, as exemplified by naloxone education and awareness efforts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Only with the active involvement and expertise of all relevant federal agencies will we be successful in achieving our shared goal of preventing overdose deaths, saving lives, and helping connect individuals to treatment and recovery.

We stand ready to partner with you to ensure the federal government launches a much-needed, coordinated national effort focused on the prevention of overdose fatalities, with a particular focus on patient, health professional, and public education and awareness efforts centered on the effectiveness of naloxone as a potentially life-saving opioid antagonist. Thank you for your attention to our request, and we look forward to working with you to prevent and reduce deaths from overdose.

Sincerely,

UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS

**American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
American Association of Poison Control Centers
American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence
American Medical Association
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society for Pain Management Nursing
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
California Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors
Drug Policy Alliance
Harm Reduction Coalition
International Nurses Society on Addictions
Legal Action Center
Mental Health America
McShin Foundation
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors
National Fibromyalgia & Chronic Pain Association
National Association of Hispanic Nurses
Pain Treatment Topics
RADARS® System**

Trust for America's Health

cc: Tom Frieden, MD, MPH - Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Margaret A. Hamburg, MD - Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration
Mary K. Wakefield, PhD, RN. - Administrator, Health Resources and Services
Administration
Nora D. Volkow, MD - Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse
Pamela S. Hyde, JD - Administrator, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services
Administration