



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

July 10, 2015

The Honorable Edward Markey
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to thank you for your leadership in promoting an approach that recognizes the need for a broad range of actions to address the epidemic of prescription drug abuse and heroin overdose that is affecting communities across the nation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that, in 2012, health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for opioid painkillers, which would be enough for every adult in the U.S. to have a bottle of painkillers. Nearly 17,000 people died from an overdose of prescription painkillers in 2011—roughly equating to 46 deaths every day. Additionally, during 2002-2013, the number of people who died from heroin overdose nearly quadrupled, totaling more than 8,200 deaths in 2013. The strongest risk factor for heroin addiction is addiction to prescription opioid painkillers. A comprehensive response is necessary to combat this complex epidemic. We applaud your commitment to addressing many important aspects along the education, prevention, treatment and recovery continuum to tackle the opioid epidemic by introducing legislation and urging federal agencies to bolster their efforts to address this public health crisis, including:

- S. 1455, the Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment Act, which would expand the ability of trained medical professionals to provide medication-assisted therapies to help increase the number of patients who have access to life-saving treatment;
- S. 1410, the Treatment and Recovery Investment Act, which would support treatment and recovery for people with substance use disorders including a specific focus on pregnant and parenting women and adolescents;
- S. 1409, the Supporting Positive Outcomes After Release Act, which would prohibit states from terminating inmates' Medicaid coverage while incarcerated to improve access to critical health care services they need upon reentering the community;
- S. 1392, the Safe Prescribing of Controlled Substances Act, which would require mandatory education for prescribers focusing on best practices for pain management, methods for diagnosing and treating a substance use disorder and tools to manage adherence and diversion of controlled substances including the use of prescription drug monitoring programs;

- S. 707, the Opioid Overdose Reduction Act, which would provide protection for health professionals from civil liability when providing or administering life-saving opioid overdose prevention drugs under certain circumstances;
- Calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense and Indian Health Services to ensure that all health providers are fully participating in PDMPs in the states where they practice; and
- Partnering with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to call on the Department of Health and Human Services to issue a surgeon general's report to help draw attention to the gravity of the problem and help drive national efforts.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to advance a robust strategy to put a stop to the prescription drug and heroin epidemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director