

November 23, 2021

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for the Improving Access to Care and Treatment Act

Dear Senators Shaheen and Capito:

As advocates for people with opioid use disorder (OUD), we are doing all we can to ensure that all life saving treatment options are available to help people in their recovery journey. To that end, we want to thank you for introducing S. 3257, the Improving Access to Care and Treatment (IMPACT) Act. This bill, when enacted, will expand treatment options for patients with OUD.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 136 people die each day due to an opioid overdose¹. The opioid crisis has grown dramatically in the past several years, with more than 71,000 opioid-related deaths reported in the 12 months ending in February 2021.² Some 2.1 million Americans live with OUD.³ It is critical that we deploy every tool in our toolbox to address this issue.

One critical tool we have is medication. Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) are a gold standard for treating OUD. The Surgeon General Report states that "MAT (now MOUD) combined with psychosocial therapies and community-based recovery supports is the gold standard for treating opioid addiction."⁴ Patients who take MOUD are shown to have improved survival rates and increased treatment retention.

Together, we must seek to remove barriers to patient access to MOUD. In 2018, in the middle of the rising opioid epidemic, Congress passed the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act ("SUPPORT Act") with the goal of expanding access to MOUD. The Act attempted to balance the need to improve access to leading-edge treatments, including LAI buprenorphine, while guarding against the potential for diversion observed with oral forms of the medication.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

³ https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/aatod_2018_final.pdf

⁴ https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/Spotlight-on-Opioids_09192018.pdf

Accordingly, the SUPPORT Act addressed prior dispensing limitations requiring a practitioner to purchase LAI buprenorphine under what is known as “buy-and-bill” by also adding the option of dispensing the medication by a specialty pharmacy, but only if the medication was administered to the OUD patient within 14 days of its receipt.

While well-intentioned, this new dispensing option has not translated into expanded access to LAI buprenorphine largely due to the challenges that the 14-day limit presents for practitioners and patients alike. This limit is often infeasible in practice considering the multi-layered coordination required among the pharmacy, provider, and patient in combination with medication shipping delays.

In addition, an August 2020 report⁵ from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) confirmed that the use of these medications only accounts for approximately one percent of the total prescriptions for buprenorphine products.

The GAO study found that “because patients lack control over the administration of injectable and implantable buprenorphine, patients receive consistent treatment exposure and therefore experienced improved health outcomes and reduced opportunities for diversion.” Furthermore, “all of the provider groups GAO spoke with said that diversion of injectable buprenorphine is unlikely, and representatives from three of the six provider groups said that the design of these formulations reduces opportunities for diversion due to how they are administered.”

We appreciate your support in helping to address the unprecedented challenges that families and communities are facing because of the opioid epidemic. The opioid crisis has caused an indescribable amount of suffering throughout our country, and we remain hopeful that S. 3257, the IMPACT Act, will help ensure that innovative and life-saving therapies, including LAI buprenorphine, reach patients.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Opioid Recovery
Aimed Alliance
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Center for U.S. Policy
FORCE
Healthy Women
Kennedy Forum
Maryland Heroin Awareness
Mother’s Addiction Journey

No More OD’s Inc.
Partnership to End Addiction
Prevention Action Alliance
Shatterproof
The Voices Project
Tyler’s Light
Young People in Recovery

⁵ Opioid Use Disorder: Treatment with Injectable and Implantable Buprenorphine, GAO (Aug. 2020). (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/708581.pdf>)