

April 17, 2024

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Stephen L. Lieberman
Deputy to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough and Dr. Lieberman:

In light of an opioid epidemic that claimed 80,000 American lives last year, we urge the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (“the Department”) to make *all clinically appropriate* non-opioid therapies available to VA health plan participants. In doing so, the Department can prevent opioid addiction and save lives.

Nearly half of combat wounded veterans report misusing prescription opioids. They are not alone. All told, approximately 4 million Americans become newly persistent opioid users every year following exposure to opioids after an acute pain incident such as an accident, sports injury, trauma, or surgery. These prescribed pills can also lead to further illicit opioid use, as 75 percent of heroin users report initiating with prescription opioid pills that were either legally prescribed to them or diverted from someone else’s partially used medication.

Unfortunately, the VA National Formulary (“VANF”) does not include several FDA-approved, safe, and effective non-opioid analgesic products, meaning VA patients have little choice in managing their acute pain symptoms. As a result, the policy embraced by the VANF unnecessarily exposes our nation’s veterans to opioid-based analgesic products. This decision is putting their lives in jeopardy.

We urge VANF to update its coverage policy to make all clinically appropriate non-opioid therapies available to VA patients immediately.

Clinically appropriate non-opioid therapies include products that are:

- Approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and, as such, deemed to be safe and effective;
- Indicated for use in providing analgesic support for acute, postsurgical pain; and
- Proven to reduce quantities of opioids prescribed.

The men and women who serve our country as part of our Armed Services deserve the best of us. This includes setting them up for success after their service. In honor of the sacrifices these brave men and women have made on behalf of our country, we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure they receive the best health benefits we can provide. This includes ensuring they can access the full range of non-opioid analgesic products after surgery.

Because they have earned it.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to working with the Department on this urgent public health need and partnering on preventing opioid addiction.

Sincerely,

Adult & Teen Challenge
Air Force Sergeants Association
Ambulatory Surgery Center Association
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology
American Warrior Partnership
Amputee Coalition
Asheville Equine Therapy Inc.
Aurora Sober Living
A Voice in the Wilderness Empowerment Center
Battle Within
Behavioral Medicine
Better Together CT
Blue Star Service Dogs
Braach Shepherds 4 Veterans
CADCA
Casting Vets
CLEAR1
Country Wellness LLC
Dropping 22
Frontline Healing Foundation
Green Beret Foundation
Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center
Healing on the Fly
Herren Project
Ho'ola Veteran Services/ Ho'ola Farms
Humble Grunt Work
Independence for Veterans
Iowa Democratic Veterans Caucus
Jamie Daniels Foundation
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center
Medicaid CHIP Services Dental Association
Mental Health America
Mental Health Association in Delaware
Mental Health America of Illinois
Mental Health Colorado
Michigan Women Veterans Empowerment
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Social Workers
National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
National Recovery Center
National Transitions of Care Coalition
New Jersey Veterans Network
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Operation First Response, Inc.

Overdose Lifeline
PTSD Awareness Summit
RetireSafe
Salvage USA
Sanctuary Foundation for Veterans
SE Roxbury Community Partnership
SHE RECOVERS Foundation
Society for Opioid-Free Anesthesia
Society of Behavioral Medicine
Soldier Strong
Team Sharing, Inc.
The Kennedy Forum
United Soldiers and Sailors of America
VetPark's A.T.V
Veterans Healing Farm
Veterans Health and Wellness Foundation
Veterans Helping Veterans Worldwide
Veterans National Recovery Center
Veterans Navigation Center
Veterans Outreach Center
Voices for Awareness Foundation
Voices for Non-Opioid Choices
Warren Coalition
Warrior Path Home
Warrior Surf Foundation
West Warwick Prevention Coalition
Wiley H. Manns Foundation
Will Bright Foundation
Zellner Foundation