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22 Senators and over 70 National Organizations Urge the VA to Expand Access to Non-Opioids

Nearly half of combat wounded veterans report misuse of prescription opioids, resulting in tens of thousands of overdose deaths and billions of dollars in excess health spending; increased non-opioids could help alleviate this crisis

Washington, DC (April 29, 2024) – Recently, a group of bipartisan leaders in the Senate, led by Sens. Shaheen (D-NH), Capito (R-WV), Baldwin (D-WI), and Braun (R-IN), stood up for our country’s heroes by calling on Veteran Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough to ensure greater access to non-opioids in all VA facilities. Voices for Non-Opioid Choices (“Voices”) applauds the leadership and dedication of these 22 leaders in the Senate for taking important steps to address the opioid addiction crisis and working together to ensure that VA facilities offer the highest level of care. The opioid addiction crisis has not spared active-duty service members, veterans, retirees, and their families. The letter sent to Secretary McDonough is an important step in protecting veterans and their families from unnecessary exposure to prescription opioids.

At the same time, Voices and 74 organizations representing over 21 states, sent their own letter to Secretary McDonough, asking the VA National Formulary to update its coverage policy. The letter asks the Secretary to make all FDA-approved, clinically appropriate non-opioid therapies available to all VA patients. Nearly half of combat-wounded veterans report misusing opioids prescribed to them. Voices is dedicated to ensuring that members of the military and their families receive unrestrained access to non-addictive pain therapies regardless of where they receive care.

“Voices is working tirelessly to make non-addictive pain therapies accessible for all Americans,” said **Chris Fox, Executive Director of the Voices for Non-Opioid Choices Coalition**. “We’re glad to partner with many organizations across the country working to ensure active-duty service members, veterans, retirees, and their families receive the care they deserve.”

“Nearly half of combat wounded veterans report misuse of prescription opioids, and drug overdose mortality rates among veterans also increased by 53% from 2010–2019. Therefore, it is even more important to protect veterans from unnecessary exposure to prescription opioids. One critical tool to prevent opioid addiction before it starts is to incentivize the use of VA approved non-opioid pain management options, including drugs and devices.” **Senator Shaheen, New Hampshire**

“We commend the VA on their overall reduction in opioid prescriptions – a significant accomplishment when two-thirds of veterans report experiencing pain. Unfortunately, estimates show that opioids remain the default treatment for patients with acute pain, and more than 3.75 million initiate long-term opioid use after a low-risk surgery. Given this data and compounded with the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States remains deep in an ongoing opioid epidemic with a record-breaking number of overdose deaths last year. We also know active-duty service members, veterans, retirees and their families are not immune to the opioid addiction crisis,” **Senator Capito, West Virginia**

"SoldierStrong is dedicated to providing our patriots with the resources and support they need to overcome obstacles new and old. Unfortunately, the opioid epidemic is an obstacle we haven't yet overcome. That's why we joined countless other organizations in calling on the VA to ensure access to life-saving, non-addictive therapies to treat acute pain. We're dedicated to ensuring that active military, veterans, and their families have the care that they deserve and options they need to combat the opioid epidemic," said **SoldierStrong a leading veterans service organization and a member of the Voices Veterans' Advocacy Committee**

Voices is committed to ensuring that all Americans can access non-addictive pain management approaches regardless of health insurance status or care setting. Last Congress, the Non-Opioids Prevent Addiction in the Nation (“NOPAIN”) Act, championed by the Voices coalition, was passed to expand patient and provider access to FDA-approved non-opioid pain management approaches in outpatient surgical settings beginning in 2025. Voices is working to build on the foundation laid by the NOPAIN Act to ensure that active-duty service members, veterans, retirees, and their families are afforded the same benefits as civilians when receiving care at VA hospitals.

Read the text of the Senate letter [HERE](#) and the letter sent by organizations [HERE](#).

About Voices for Non-Opioid Choices

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices is a nonpartisan coalition dedicated to preventing opioid addiction before it starts by increasing patient and provider access to non-opioid therapies and approaches to manage acute pain. For more information, visit www.nonopioidchoices.org.

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