

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 13, 2015

Dr. Thomas R. Frieden  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Frieden:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to address our nation's epidemic of prescription drug abuse and drug overdose. We are writing in regards to the efforts being undertaken at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop best prescribing practices for opioids.

As you are aware, drug overdose deaths have now surpassed car accidents as the leading cause of injury death in the United States. This increase has been attributed in significant part to overdoses involving prescription opioids and other prescription medications. According to data from the CDC, more than 16,000 lives have been lost annually in recent years due to prescription opioid overdose death. In addition to the lives lost, millions of Americans have abused or are addicted to opioid pain medications. Consequently, we are now seeing a resurgence in heroin use and overdose death as individuals struggling with opioid use disorders transition from prescription opioids to heroin.

While addressing this epidemic will require a long-term commitment, there are steps that we can take in the short-term that will have a meaningful impact, including increasing access to naloxone, expanding prevention efforts, supporting state efforts to better utilize their Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, and ensuring that prescribers have the training and tools they need to properly prescribe opioids.

We appreciate the ultimate goals of the task undertaken by the CDC to develop guidelines for prescribing opioid medications to treat chronic pain in primary care settings. These guidelines, along with other educational resources, have the potential to serve as a significant tool for prescribers. In fact, it is our belief that the draft guidelines have already elevated and further spurred an important dialogue among health care professionals concerning opioid prescribing practices and trends in this country.

Treating patients with pain, particularly chronic pain, is understandably a challenging endeavor for the medical community as well as their patients. We regularly hear from constituents, including many prescribers, who would like to see more educational opportunities and tools made available to assist with this aspect of medical practice. In our experience, the vast majority of prescribers want to be engaged partners in the effort to prevent opioid abuse and seek to find

the right balance between safeguarding their patients against addiction and overdose risk, and ensuring their patients for whom opioids are the best pain management treatment option are able to safely receive those medications. Tools like the CDC guidelines can play a helpful role in that effort.

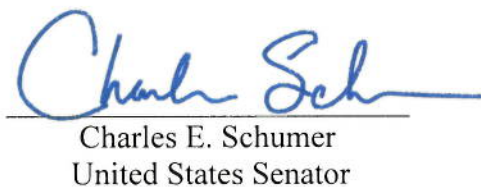
As the process of developing these guidelines continues, we ask that the CDC recognize the importance of ensuring that the guidelines represent the best evidenced-based practices available at this time while also ensuring that the guidelines take into account the practical experiences of prescribers, as well as their professional feedback. We also believe it is important that stakeholders and the public understand the framework that the CDC has used to develop the guidelines as well as the scientific standards that underlie that process. As the CDC continues its efforts, we request that the CDC ensure it engages medical professionals, patients, and other key stakeholders and that the final guidelines take into account feedback from these groups, including those of patients and medical experts who have experience treating addiction and chronic pain.

Thank you again for your attention to this ongoing public health crisis in our country and for your consideration of our letter.

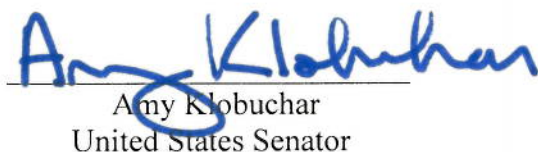
Sincerely,

  
Joe Donnelly  
United States Senator

  
Kelly A. Ayotte  
United States Senator

  
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

  
Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator

  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator