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United States Senate

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Robert McSwain
Acting Director of the Indian Health Service
The Reyes Building
801 Thompson Avenue
Rockville MD, 20852

Dear Acting Director McSwain,

Prescription drug abuse is a national epidemic that has increased dramatically in the past decade. Drug overdose deaths, fueled by prescription painkillers, now surpass homicides and traffic crashes in the number of injury deaths in the United States.¹ Prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMP), the statewide databases that track controlled substances dispensed in the state, can be a highly effective tool to reinforce the federal government's efforts to combat the epidemic. I applaud the Indian Health Service (IHS) for issuing recommendations to prescribers on how to utilize prescription drug monitoring data to identify prescription drug abuse and diversion. However, in order for PDMPs to function as intended and to serve as a robust tool in reducing prescription drug abuse and misuse, it is imperative that all prescribers, including federal prescribers, participate in these programs. Therefore, I am writing to request that the IHS ensures that its prescribers are fully participating in PDMPs in states where IHS facilities are located.

Although American Indians and Alaska Natives account for only 1.7 percent of the United States population, approximately 14.9 percent reported a substance abuse problem in 2013.² American Indian and Alaska Native populations have disproportionately high rates of substance use disorders and are more likely to overdose on prescription painkillers compared to other racial-ethnic groups.^{2,3} Almost half of American Indian and Alaska Native adult substance abuse treatment admissions are referred through the criminal justice system.⁴ Substance use in these communities contributes to a range of social problems including violence, delinquency, mental health problems and suicide.⁵ Given the high rates of substance use-related problems, it is important to implement interventions that can reduce the impact of substance abuse in this population.

¹ <http://www.drugstorenews.com/article/office-national-drug-control-policy-releases-2014-national-drug-control-strategy>

² <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHresultsPDFHTML2013/Web/NSDUHresults2013.pdf>

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2011-11-vitalsigns.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/Spot107AIANAadultCJAdmissions/Spot107AIANAadultCJAdmissions.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.samhsa.gov/specific-populations/racial-ethnic-minority>

The Indian Health Service can play a critical role in addressing the prescription drug problem by participating in PDMPs which can identify or prevent drug diversion, change prescribing behavior, facilitate the identification of individuals who may have an addiction problem and reduce prescription drug abuse.² In light of the disproportionate high rates of substance use among American Indian and Alaska Native populations and the need for targeted prevention strategies, I strongly urge the Indian Health Service to implement guidelines requiring its providers to participate in PDMPs in states where they practice.

Thank you for your consideration for this important matter. Please provide your response no later than June 12, 2015. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Chisina Kapungu or Dr. Avenel Joseph in my office at (202) 224-2742.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey