



The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States Senate
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

July 18, 2014

Dear Senator Markey:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to improving the health of all Americans, I am pleased to endorse the Recovery Enhancement for Treatment (TREAT) Act. We thank you for introducing this legislation which will help expand access to Medication-Assisted Treatment for addiction.

Prescription drug abuse is a growing public health crisis. Approximately 6.1 million Americans abuse or misuse prescription drugs, and more than 60 Americans die every day from a prescription drug overdose. Overdose deaths involving prescription painkillers have quadrupled since 1999 and now outnumber deaths from all illicit drugs, including heroin and cocaine, combined.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, addiction to any drug – prescribed or illicit – is a brain disease that can be effectively treated. For addiction to prescription painkillers and other opioids, the treatment can include medications such as buprenorphine which can ease or eliminate withdrawal symptoms. Medication-Assisted Treatment combines use of medications under doctor supervision along with counseling and, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is often the best choice for opioid addiction.

Unfortunately, substance abuse treatment has been underfunded for decades, and while there has been more than a five-fold increase in treatment admissions for prescription drug abuse in the past decade, millions more are going untreated. Furthermore, physicians, other healthcare providers and treatment centers must receive special authorization under federal law to treat painkiller addiction with controlled substances such as methadone and buprenorphine, so the number of providers and availability of medications for treatments is limited and often difficult for patients to access.

The Recovery Enhancement for Treatment (TREAT) Act would help expand access to Medication Assisted Treatment by increasing the number of patients doctors can prescribe for and treat, from 30 patients to 100 patients. It will also allow providers to request removal of patient caps after one year, and expand the definition of eligible providers who can administer treatment. This common sense expansion of the current limitations will help increase the number of patients who have access to effective lifesaving treatment for addiction.



Reversing the prescription drug abuse epidemic will require a range of strategies and policies, including public education about the dangers of prescription drugs; education for health care providers on how some medications may be misused and how to recognize the signs of addiction; and a strong network of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs to help track the prescribing and dispensing of controlled prescription drugs. Expanded access to substance abuse treatment for those suffering from addiction is an essential part of any effective strategy to prevent or reduce drug abuse, and the TREAT Act is an important step in that effort.

Thank you for your commitment to addressing the growing problem of prescription drug abuse. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "L".

Jeffrey Levi, Ph.D.
Executive Director