

May 3-4, 2016

## Stemming the Increase in Opioid Abuse

**House members should follow the Senate in passing the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (S. 524/H.R. 953), legislation that provides grant funding for efforts to mitigate and stem the growing problem of opioid and substance abuse disorders in this country, as described below in the “What’s ACP’s view” section.**

### What’s it all about?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids increased 2000 percent from 2000 to 2014. In 2014, sixty-one percent of drug overdose deaths involved some form of opioid. On average, 78 Americans die daily from overdoses of heroin and painkillers. Researchers find prescription opioid abuse serves as a gateway to heroin use, as 80 percent of heroin initiates previously misused prescription drugs. Data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse show increasing numbers of high school students and young adults using OxyContin. The health care community, including ACP, has rallied to combat this alarming trend.

### What’s the current status?

In view of the worsening crisis, the CDC proposed revised guidelines for the prescribing of opioids. This past January, ACP commented on the proposal noting that the guideline development was “both timely and necessary to help effectively address the increasingly clear public health problem of inappropriate opioid use and its related adverse consequences.” As noted below, while ACP supported the guidelines in general, the College pushed to make sure the extensive recommendations would not be too rigid.

Legislation to address the crisis, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), S. 524, was passed by the Senate on March 10, 2016 by a vote of 94-1. As noted below, ACP strongly supported passage of CARA. The House has not yet acted on the bill.

### Why should the 114th Congress address it?

The House has not yet taken up companion legislation, H.R. 953, to the Senate-passed CARA legislation. The House Judiciary Committee has not scheduled a hearing on H.R. 953. A second Senate bill that contains important measures to address the opioid abuse was reported unanimously by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on March 16. With national attention focused on this issue to such a great degree, there won’t be a better time for the Congress to finish the job started by the Senate’s enactment of CARA and move a bill to the President’s desk. This should be done as soon as possible as, according to the Addiction Forum, for every week we wait, another 903 lives are lost.

### What’s ACP’s view?

Consistent with the College’s 2013 Prescription Drug Abuse [paper](#), ACP is a strong supporter CARA. [Read](#) the College’s support letter sent to the entire Senate in February. ACP very much appreciates the overwhelming bipartisan support for the measure demonstrated by the Senate floor vote. Now it is essential that the House follow suit by enacting the companion bill, H.R. 953.

Provisions of CARA that ACP believes to be especially important include:

**Establishment of state grants to: expand educational efforts to prevent abuse of opioids, heroin, and other substances of abuse, understand addiction as a chronic disease, and promote treatment and recovery; creation of a Task Force to develop: (1) best practices for pain management and prescribing pain medication, and (2) a strategy for disseminating such best practices.**

ACP urges the House to follow the Senate's lead and pass H.R. 953, the House version of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2015, introduced by Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and pending in the House Judiciary Committee. We urge House members to co-sponsor H.R. 953 and to urge their colleagues on the Judiciary Committee, and House leadership, to move it to a vote.

ACP also supports making grants to eligible entities to expand or make available disposal sites for unwanted prescription medications. We urge legislators to seek cosponsor for H.R. 2463, the Dispose Responsibly of your Pills Act introduced by Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA) a fellow of the College with bipartisan support.

In addition, ACP urges the development of evidence-based clinical guidelines and other tools to facilitate appropriate opioid prescribing and supports the development of prescribing guidelines for health care providers within the federal government who prescribe opioids, as contained in the Co-prescribing Saves Lives Act of 2015, S. 2256, as included in the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016, S. 2680, sponsored by Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN), ranking member Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT), and Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), and approved unanimously on March 16, 2016 by the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee. (Note that Senator Cassidy is an internist with a history of working with the College, both as a congressman and now as a U.S. senator.)

Furthermore, ACP supports access to naloxone within the community as also contained in S. 2256, as approved on March 16, 2016 by the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee and included in the Mental Health Reform Act, S. 2680.

ACP also supports reauthorization of the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting as contained in S. 480 and approved on March 16, 2016 by the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee as part of the Mental Health Reform Act, S. 2680.

ACP supports "partial-fill" which would allow a patient to elect to receive a portion of a prescription, and return for either a portion of, or the remainder of the prescription, if the pain persists, up to a 30-day maximum. This provision was also included in the Mental Health Reform Act, S. 2680 as approved by the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee March 16, 2016.

In addition to urging the House to bring H.R. 953 to a vote, we urge that the above ACP-supported provisions in H.R. 2463, S. 2680, S. 480 and S. 2256 be passed by both the House and Senate and included in final legislation that is sent to the President for his signature.

### **Who can I contact to learn more?**

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Digital version of this issue brief can be found at: <https://www.acpservices.org/leadership-day/policy-priority-issues>