



APhA

2215 Constitution Avenue, NW • Washington, DC 20037-2985

April 11, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Pallone and the Energy and Commerce Committee:

On behalf of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and our members, I write to you today to express our gratitude for what you are doing to address the opioid crisis that is ravaging many of our communities. APhA and our members agree that more needs to be done to help the individuals and communities you serve who suffer as a result of the widespread misuse and abuse of prescription opioid pain relievers. APhA, founded in 1852 as the American Pharmaceutical Association, represents 64,000 pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, student pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and others interested in improving medication use and advancing patient care. APhA members provide care in all practice settings, including community pharmacies, physicians' offices, hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health centers, managed care organizations, hospice settings and the uniformed services.

As the most accessible health care practitioner, pharmacists are uniquely aware of the harm caused to individuals and communities by the opioid epidemic. And that is why it is so important to include the *Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act* (H.R. 592) in the legislation you are crafting to address the opioid issue. H.R. 592 increases medically underserved Medicare Part B beneficiaries' access to health care through pharmacists' services. Many patients do not have adequate access to practitioners who can optimize their care and outcomes. Pharmacists are eager to fill these treatment gaps, but barriers in Medicare unnecessarily restrict patients from accessing these health care providers.

In response to the opioid epidemic, pharmacists, the medication experts on the patient's health care team, have enhanced their efforts and expanded their services to fill gaps in care. However, without being recognized by Medicare, pharmacists' services are not accessible to beneficiaries, despite being qualified to provide needed health care services. Although there are several root problems associated with the opioid epidemic, it is clear that more attention needs to be paid to the treatments patients are prescribed, how they take their medications, and what happens when they no longer need the prescription.

Pharmacists are involved in pain management programs that include medication tapering services, work in medication assisted treatment programs, and furnish naloxone where authorized. Depending on state authority, pharmacists working under collaborative practice agreements can initiate, monitor, modify, and discontinue medication therapy, including opioids, and order and interpret laboratory tests in collaboration with other members of the health care team. Patients living with chronic conditions frequently have medications, including opioids, from multiple providers. Pharmacists are often the only practitioner who sees the patient's complete medication profile and can help bridge the communication gap between health care providers by coordinating care and providing medication-related services. In addition, they are highly accessible as 89% of



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Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy. However, because Medicare and other payers do not cover pharmacist services, patients are unable to benefit from their expertise and care. To better utilize pharmacists in addressing the opioid epidemic, APhA urges Congress to pass H.R. 592, legislation that will improve patient outcomes and care by enabling patients to access the care and services from pharmacists – the health care practitioner with the most medication-related education and training.

APhA also notes the broad Congressional support for the *Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act* which currently has over 250 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. We urge you to advance this legislation.

APhA welcomes a meeting to discuss ways pharmacists can improve patient care and the health care system generally, including ways to combat the opioid epidemic. Until then, APhA and our members will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to address the opioid epidemic. Thank you for continuing to prioritize patients and communities in your policymaking and efforts. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Alicia Kerry J. Mica, Senior Lobbyist, at AMica@aphanet.org or by phone to (202) 429-7507.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Menighan, BSPHarm, MBA, ScD (Hon), FAPhA
Executive Vice President and CEO

cc: Stacie Maass, BSPHarm, JD, Senior Vice President, Pharmacy Practice and Government Affairs