



# ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

## ALPHA

April 2, 2018

The Honorable Les Gara  
House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 511  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Gara:

The Alaska Public Health Association is pleased to write this letter in support of HB 268 on Opioid Prescription Information.

According to the State of Alaska, Section of Epidemiology, Alaska's prescription opioid pain reliever overdose death rate has been more than double the rate in the United States and Alaska's heroin-associated overdose death rate has been over 50% higher than the national rate. Improving opioid prescribing practices to reduce exposure to opioids, prevent abuse, and stop addiction is an important strategy to reduce opioid overdose deaths in Alaska.

The Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) is a regional affiliate of the American Public Health Association. It is a statewide membership organization of health professionals, advocates, students and community members that are dedicated to improving the health of all Alaskans.

Attached, for your information, is ALPHA's "Resolution in Support for State Efforts to Address Opioid Overdose Deaths" adopted in 2016.

Sincerely,

Patty Owen  
Policy Committee Co-Chair

**ALPHA Resolution Support for State Efforts to Address Opioid Overdose Deaths**  
**2016-01**

WHEREAS the United States is in the midst of a drug overdose epidemic, more people died from drug overdoses in 2014 than in any prior year on record.<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS deaths from drug overdose are elevated amongst both men and women, all races, and adults of nearly all ages<sup>1</sup> in urban and rural settings and across socio-economic strata.

WHEREAS nationwide more than six out of ten drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS opioids are substances that work on the nervous system in the body or specific receptors in the brain to reduce the intensity of pain<sup>2</sup> and are most often used medically to relieve pain.

WHEREAS brain abnormalities resulting from chronic use of opioids are the underlying causes of opioid dependence (the need to keep taking drugs to avoid a withdrawal syndrome) and addiction (intense drug craving and compulsive use).<sup>3</sup>

WHEREAS common opioid prescription drugs include oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, methadone and fentanyl and common opioid illicit drugs include heroin, illegally made fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

WHEREAS since 1999 the nationwide number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioid pain relievers and heroin) has nearly quadrupled<sup>4</sup>, while seventy-eight (78) Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS Alaska's prescription opioid pain reliever overdose death rate is more than double the rate in the United States and Alaska's heroin-associated overdose death rate is over 50% higher than the national rate.<sup>5</sup>

WHEREAS opioid abuse is a serious public health issue in Alaska.

WHEREAS actions taken to reduce prescribing of opioids, expand access to treatment of addiction, and reduce access to illegal opioids will reduce opioid overdose deaths.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the Alaska Public Health Association will promote and advocate support for the actions advanced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to:

- Improve opioid prescribing to reduce exposure to opioids, prevent abuse, and stop addiction.
- Expand access to evidence-based substance abuse treatment, such as Medication-Assisted Treatment, for people already struggling with opioid addiction.
- Implement and strengthen strategies that help prevent high-risk prescribing and prevent opioid overdose.
- Expand access and use of naloxone—a safe antidote to reverse opioid overdose.
- Promote the use of state prescription drug monitoring programs, which give health care providers information to improve patient safety and prevent abuse.

- Improve detection of the trends of opioid use by working with state and local public health agencies, medical examiners and coroners, and law enforcement.
- Advocate for youth substance abuse prevention, such as intensive family or school based programs.
- Conduct patient, healthcare professional, pharmacist, and law enforcement education on the safe storage and disposal of controlled substances.<sup>6</sup>

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, the Alaska Public Health Association will, as opportunities arise, contribute to the work of the Alaska Opioid Policy Task Force, and the State of Alaska grants from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the Prescription Drug Opioid Overdose Prevention program; the Medication – Assisted Treatment Prescription Drug Opioid Addiction program; and the Prescription Drug Overdose: Data Driven Prevention Initiative.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution shall be the position of the Alaska Public Health Association until it is withdrawn or modified by a subsequent resolution.

**Fiscal and Public Health Impact Statement:** This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution to ALPHA's federal, state, tribal and local partners. ALPHA's actions will help to address the substantial human and financial costs of the epidemic of opioid overdose deaths in the State of Alaska.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Increases in Drug and Opioid Overdose Deaths — United States, 2000–2014. MMWR 2015; 64;1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Prevention and Control: Opioid Overdose. Accessed 12/16/16: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kosten TR, George TP. The neurobiology of opioid dependence: implications for treatment, Sci Pract Perspect. 2002 Jul; 1 (1):13-20. Accessed 12/16/16:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2851054/>.

<sup>4</sup> CDC. Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics; 2016. Accessed 12/16/16: <http://wonder.cdc.gov>.

<sup>5</sup> State of Alaska Epidemiology Bulletin No. 6, March 24, 2016, Drug Overdose Deaths in Alaska 2009–2015. Accessed 12/16/16: [http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2016\\_06.pdf](http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2016_06.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Prevention and Control: Opioid Overdose. Accessed 12/16/16: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/odprevention.html>