

FDA needs to tackle opioid epidemic

Written by By Sen. Martin Heinrich
Friday, 16 February 2024 00:00



Heinrich leads bipartisan letter urgency agency to step up

WASHINGTON D.C. — U.S. Senators Martin Heinrich, the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee, along with Senators Mike Braun, R-Ind., Ed Markey, D-Mass., Angus King, I-Vt., and Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., led a letter to the Food and Drug Administration urging the agency to include Medications for Opioid Use Disorder, specifically buprenorphine and methadone, in its List of Essential Medicines, an action that would significantly help health care providers address the ongoing opioid epidemic.

In the letter dated Feb. 9, the lawmakers write, “We are writing to request the addition of Medications for Opioid Use Disorder, specifically buprenorphine and methadone, to the Food and Drug Administration’s List of Essential Medicines. The use of MOUD is a critical and comprehensive tool to support the recovery of people with Opioid Use Disorder. By including MOUD in the FDA’s List of Essential Medicines, we can ensure that these life-saving treatments are available in emergency departments and inpatient settings in hospitals across the United States. This will enable health care providers to respond more effectively to the urgent needs of OUD patients, and potentially saving countless lives.”

Data clearly demonstrates that MOUD significantly reduce the risk of overdose deaths – a recent study of individuals with OUD found they were 82% less likely to die from an opioid overdose when they received treatment with buprenorphine or methadone than when they did not. Despite the proven effectiveness of MOUD, many hospitals and EDs do not include MOUD in their formularies.

The lawmakers conclude, “Including MOUD on the FDA’s List of Essential Medicines will make them more accessible to patients who have OUD, especially in the inpatient setting. The

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inclusion of MOUD is a crucial step forward in addressing this public health crisis and ensuring the well-being of our communities. We request that you add MOUD to the FDA's essential medicines list to ensure that OUD patients have access to MOUD while in the hospital."

This letter is supported by American College of Emergency Physicians, the Global Health Incubator's Overdose Prevention Initiative, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

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