



**Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
On Behalf of the American Academy of PAs**

On behalf of more than 123,000 nationally-certified PAs (physician assistants), the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding the recent hearing held by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health on “Combating the Opioid Crisis: Helping Communities Balance Enforcement and Patient Safety.”

AAPA would like to thank Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member Green for holding this vitally important hearing, and for continuing to shine a spotlight on an issue that impacts so many individuals in the United States. AAPA would also like to thank the witnesses for both their testimony and their work in combatting this crisis, as well as the legislators whose efforts to fight the opioid crisis were the focus of this hearing.

AAPA appreciates the work being done by Congress and the relevant federal agencies, as well as dedicated healthcare providers to combat the abuse, diversion, morbidity and mortality associated with the misuse of opioids that is devastating families and communities across our nation.

PAs are one of three types of healthcare professionals, including physicians and nurse practitioners, who provide medical care in the United States. PAs practice and prescribe in all 50 states and every setting and specialty, improving healthcare access and quality. Of 123,000 practicing PAs, approximately 30,000 practice in addiction medicine or primary care, where they commonly work with patients who struggle with opioid use disorder (OUD). These PAs are on the “front lines” of the opioid epidemic in hospitals, private practices, community health centers, rural health clinics, non-federally qualified public or community health clinics, prisons, behavioral healthcare facilities, and free clinics. Another 45,000 PAs practicing in surgical specialties and emergency medicine may prescribe opioids to their patients for pain control. PAs in the United States have upwards of 400 million patient encounters annually.

AAPA recognizes the need to ensure that patients receive medically appropriate care to address both acute and chronic pain and that the necessary steps are taken to minimize the risks of OUD and diversion. Treatment of both pain and OUD require that healthcare providers spend adequate time with patients and build trusting relationships that serve as the foundation to care. While the majority of patients who use prescribed opioid medications to treat acute or chronic pain do so without incident, some become dependent on them over time. AAPA believes a balance must be maintained between fighting opioid abuse and ensuring patients who need opioids for pain management are able to access them.

Prescriber Education

The AAPA is a founding partner of the Collaborative on Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) Education (CO*RE). Through participation in CO*RE, AAPA has led a national quality improvement initiative for PAs focused on responsible opioid prescribing. AAPA has expanded these efforts to focus on all aspects of the opioid epidemic and the variety of ways PAs can be leaders in addressing the epidemic. Since 2013, AAPA has provided more than 100 hours of free instruction reaching more than 10,000 PAs on pain management treatment guidelines, early detection of opioid addiction and the treatment and management of opioid dependent patients. Since the passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) in 2016, AAPA has also collaborated with the American Society of Addiction Medicine to provide a free 24-hour training program allowing PAs to obtain medication-assisted treatment (MAT) waivers to prescribe buprenorphine. To date, more than 2,000 PAs have completed this 24-hour training program. In 2018, AAPA will be providing the first in-person MAT waiver training specifically designed for PAs.

While AAPA supports efforts to expand educational opportunities for prescribers, educational requirements are best implemented at the state level to avoid practitioners having to navigate a confusing patchwork of state and federal requirements.

As existing educational mandates have not been shown to result in lower morbidity or mortality rates, AAPA supports taking a more collaborative and innovative approach. As such, AAPA has concerns related to the mandatory CME requirements in H.R. 2063, the Opioid Preventing Abuse through Continuing Education. Rather, Congress may want to consider proposals that foster new state-based resources for prescribers to consult when treating patients with pain and that assist in identifying signs of substance misuse and substance use disorder (SUD). CMS or Medicare private plans sharing information with prescribers on how their prescribing patterns compare to their peers could offer helpful information to PAs and other clinicians that may be useful in informing prescribing decisions. Given AAPA's demonstrated experience with making available quality CME to PAs, it is important that any further legislation concerning educational initiatives for prescribers include AAPA as a recognized source of education and training resources.

AAPA is committed to working with the Committee, Congress, and all relevant actors to combat the opioid epidemic in the U.S. Additionally, AAPA will continue working with all relevant healthcare provider groups in order to ensure actions undertaken will be effective, supported by evidence-based science, and consistent with the best medical practices.

The opioid crisis is a serious health epidemic affecting families and communities across America. PAs stand ready to work as partners with other healthcare professionals, Congress, states, community leaders, law enforcement, and our patients to address the many challenges and complexities arising from this crisis and the efforts to fight it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on this important issue, and please do not hesitate to contact Tate Heuer, AAPA Vice President, Federal Advocacy, at 571-319-4338 or theuer@aapa.org with any questions.