

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wyden,

The Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) represents all of Oregon's 33 local public health authorities (LPHAs). We work diligently to ensure that LPHAs have the resources and support they need to serve their communities, including advocating for policies that help LPHAs carry out their public health missions effectively.

LPHAs are on the frontlines of Oregon's opioid crisis, which is why we urge your support for the bipartisan Alternatives to Prevent Addiction in the Nation (PAIN) Act. This legislation addresses the issue of opioid misuse among seniors by ensuring that Medicare patients have access to new, non-opioid pain medications that are becoming available.

In 2022, substance use disorders and overdoses were recognized as urgent public health threats throughout the United States, including Oregon. Opioids and stimulants remain the primary substances linked to both fatal and non-fatal overdoses in the state.

Despite some progress in reducing opioid misuse and overdose rates, many challenges persist. The Oregon Health Authority estimates that five Oregonians die each week from opioid-related overdoses. In 2021, 548 Oregonians lost their lives to unintentional opioid overdoses—up from 462 deaths in 2020.

One often overlooked aspect of this crisis is its growing impact on our senior population. Nationally, in 2021 alone, 50,000 seniors overdosed on opioids, and a troubling 1 million seniors were diagnosed with opioid use disorder.

To effectively address opioid abuse among seniors, it is critical to examine the role of Medicare. While the overall number of opioid prescriptions in the U.S. has been declining since 2011, Medicare's share of these prescriptions has increased by more than 1 million. Despite recent legislative efforts to address opioid use in Medicare, these numbers indicate that more can be done.

The healthcare industry is actively developing non-opioid, non-addictive pain relievers that will provide health professionals and patients with new options for treating severe pain. These alternatives could be a game changer for older Americans at risk of opioid misuse—if they have access to them.

Support for the Alternatives to PAIN Act is crucial. This legislation would ensure that seniors can access non-opioid medications through Medicare and that the costs of these treatments are comparable to generic opioid pain medications. By leveling the cost, seniors will have the ability to choose the best treatment option for their pain management without worrying about financial barriers.

You have long been a leader in the fight against opioid addiction in the United States. We have great respect for your work and sincerely hope that you will continue to champion this cause by cosponsoring the Alternatives to PAIN Act.

Sincerely,

Sarah J Lochner  
Executive Director  
Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials  
[www.oregonclho.org](http://www.oregonclho.org)