

Dear Legislator:

I write to urge you to introduce legislation in your state to arm patients and parents with the information they need to prevent opioid dependence and addiction, and to also consider introducing legislation to ensure access to affordable, quality, non-opioid pain relief treatment.

Nearly 80,000 of our fellow Americans died of an opioid overdose in the most recently measured 12 months, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Given the increased danger of overdoses mainly due to the widespread distribution of often deadly fentanyl, it is more important than ever to take effective action. In the 21 states requiring patients to be provided with the real time information they need about the risks of opioid pain killers, it is driving down the number prescribed annually, preventing new instances of opioid use disorder and saving lives.

Every parent, every patient has the right to know the medicines they are about to receive can lead to a dependency and addiction. That is why the legislation we are advancing, the Patient Opioid Notification Act, sometimes called the State Opioid Patients' Right to Know Act, requires a conversation about the risks of dependence and the possible use of a non-opioid pain relief alternative before an opioid-based pain reliever is prescribed. Ensuring that a conversation occurs between doctors and patients and parents at the time it is most needed-- right before an opioid is prescribed --is a simple, but extremely effective step that we know saves lives.

A Brandeis University study of the law's impact in New Jersey, the first state to implement the law, found that the number of patients prescribed opioids significantly decreased. In the month after the law was implemented, nearly 5,000 fewer patients were started on opioids. There was also a fourfold increase in the percentage of doctors warning patients of the risks of addiction. Prior to enactment, only 18% of the participants warned patients about the risk of opioid addiction when prescribing opioids. After enactment, 95% routinely warned patients about the risk of addiction.

I know the importance of having this knowledge from first-hand experience. My son Steven became dependent on opioid-based pain relievers after they were prescribed to treat a sports injury. Had I just been told about the addictive qualities of the medicines Steven was prescribed, I would have known to look for alternatives. I would have known to look for signs and symptoms of abuse. And I'm not alone. A national survey done by the Hazeldon Betty Ford Foundation confirms what I have learned from talking with other parents and backs up the Brandeis University Study: 6 in 10 doctors nationally prescribe opioid painkillers without telling patients that they can be addictive.

If we are going to curb this epidemic and prevent more families around the nation from going through what my family has been through, we need legislators like yourself to make sure that

the people in your state are informed in real time, so this knowledge can be put to use. The need to provide this information in a timely way is underscored by the fact recent studies find that people can become dependent on opioids in as little as 5 days.

It is also essential that patients have access to affordable, quality non-opioid pain relief treatment. The Non-Opioid Pain Treatment Parity Act accomplishes this goal by requiring health insurers to provide the same level of coverage for effective pain relief alternatives as they do for opioids. It is often the case as blind pain studies confirm that a combination of ibuprofen and Tylenol is all that is needed. But in cases where physical therapy or one of the non-opioid prescription pain relievers that are coming on to the market, to name two examples, are called for, the parity legislation will ensure that they are well-covered by health insurance.

“As the National Opioid Commission states, “We have an enormous problem that is often not beginning on street corners; it is starting in doctor’s offices and hospitals in every state in our nation.” Drug overdoses are the leading cause of accidental death in the United States.

We stand ready to assist you in any way in the introduction and passage of these two life-saving bills. If you need more information or have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact Rob Horowitz, Prevent Opioid Abuse team member, at 401-829-8595 or by email at [rob@preventopioidabuse.org](mailto:rob@preventopioidabuse.org). The two bills are provided below. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elaine Pozyski".

Elaine Pozyski

Founder, Prevent Opioid Abuse

[www.preventopioidabuse.org](http://www.preventopioidabuse.org)