

May 9, 2017

Dear Member of Congress:

The undersigned organizations are contacting you to express our concern about proposed legislation that would allow for the importation of prescription medications from Canada and elsewhere. We agree that the high price of prescription drugs is an important issue that should be addressed. The undersigned organizations support efforts to enable U.S. consumers to have access to affordable, quality medicines. However, we disagree that allowing Americans to import foreign medicines is the solution to the drug pricing issue.

Allowing U.S. consumers to purchase prescription medications from foreign online pharmacies could further exacerbate the opioid and heroin epidemic, killing an average of 91 Americans per day. We respectfully ask that you consider the implications drug importation policy may have on this epidemic at a time when 30,000 individuals die each year as the result of an opioid-related overdose.

### **Sending Americans Online for Foreign Medicines Threatens to Exacerbate the Opioid Epidemic**

Importation of prescription drugs could undermine the significant efforts of local, state and federal stakeholders in combatting the prescription drug abuse epidemic. Despite the language of the legislation that bans importation of controlled substances, the reality is that this legislation's effect will be to send U.S. consumers online to look for medicine from foreign sellers that do not comply with U.S. law and operate outside our borders, and thus outside our ability to enforce against them.

When Americans search online to buy medicine they find approximately 34,000 websites selling prescription medicines illegally, violating U.S. laws and pharmacy practice standards as reported by [LegitScript](#). Worse yet, according to the [National Association of Boards of Pharmacy \(NABP\)](#), nearly 3,400 of these illegal online pharmacy sites—roughly 10-12% of the total market—sell opioids and other controlled substances, often without a prescription in violation of existing federal law.

Do a simple web-search for “buy hydrocodone online” (or other drug) and you'll see the evidence that this is a problem. Nearly 91% of the first-page search results for purchasing opioids online lead users to illegal websites selling prescription opioid products, according to [research issued](#) from Fisher College in Boston, MA.

The Ryan Haight Consumer Protection Act of 2008 ([Public Law 110-425](#)) made the sale and purchase of a controlled substance via the internet without a valid prescription is illegal, yet thousands of illegal sellers continue to target Americans. The Ryan Haight Act also requires these online pharmacies to disclose their location, licenses and pharmacy professionals on their websites. However, [NABP has found](#) 62% of illegal online drug sellers hide their physical locations. The World Health Organization has found that 50% of medicines from websites that hide this information are counterfeit.

Needless to say, none of these illegal online pharmacies connect to state Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) or discuss the potentially deadly side effects or drug-drug interactions associated with prescription opioids. Illegal online pharmacy websites also often sell medications for individuals with substance use disorders, also known as medication-assisted treatment, without a prescription.

## **Drug Importation Would Undermine Years of Work in the Fight Against Opioid Abuse**

Given the significant time and resources Congress has invested in addressing the prescription drug abuse epidemic, it is inconsistent—and indeed irresponsible—to support legislation that would have the effect of sending Americans to foreign online pharmacies that do and will continue to sell controlled substances without repute.

Despite the letter of the proposed prescription drug importation law, the reality is that it would put Americans in harm's way and undermine decades of work in combatting prescription drug abuse. Given the national opioid epidemic, this is exactly what the country does not need.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the undersigned organizations to further discuss.

Respectfully,

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
Gerontological Society of America  
Global Healthy Living Foundation  
Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation  
National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
Partnership for Drug-Free Kids  
Shatterproof