

**ASOP GLOBAL APPLAUDS FDA'S COMMITMENT TO COMBATING ILLEGAL ONLINE DRUG SALES**

April 5, 2019

The U.S. Food and Drug Administrations' (FDA) [Second Online Opioids Summit](#) this week provided a rare and important opportunity for government, private sector, and nonprofit stakeholders to collectively discuss strategies to address the persistent problem of illegal online drug sales.

At the Summit, outgoing FDA Commissioner Gottlieb highlighted the need to maximize the impact of combined efforts to reduce the availability of opioids online. In particular, Gottlieb cited the critical role registries and registrars play when it comes to patients' ability to buy illegal opioids online.

"I urge these stakeholders to take action to protect consumers and continue the efforts underway to address this public health crisis" said Gottlieb. "I also continue to applaud other internet stakeholders such as social media companies, search engines, and online marketplaces that have joined the discussion today and further demonstrated their commitment to protecting consumers."

In response to the Summit, the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP GLOBAL) issued the following statement:

ASOP Global is grateful for the opportunity to again participate in the Summit. The internet is awash with illegal prescription drug sellers claiming to be selling safe FDA- or Health Canada-approved medicines. At any given time, there are up to 35,000 active online 'pharmacy' websites operating on the surface web, of which approximately 95% are operating out of compliance with state and federal law and relevant pharmacy practice standards. For most consumers, finding a safe online pharmacy website can be like finding a needle in a haystack.

Today, online criminals peddling poison for profit are winning. They continue to game search engine algorithms, dodge social media and online marketplace filters, and register domain names with impunity. We cannot continue to be a step behind these illegal actors. This is especially true in the midst of the opioid epidemic, where counterfeit medicine laced with even a flake of fentanyl can – and has – killed.

With this public health crisis, domain name registries and registrars, social media companies, search engines, and online marketplaces must take steps to reduce online availability of illicit opioids and other counterfeit, falsified, substandard, or unapproved prescription drugs. These include:

- Domain name registries and registrars should immediately, on notice from a credible party, lock and suspend any domain name that is used to facilitate the illegal online sales of medicines and illicit drugs from use or resolution in the domain name system.
- Detect and remove social media posts, individual and group pages, advertisements, and other listings offering or facilitating illicit drug sales via the Internet.
- Modify search algorithms to increase page rank for verified online pharmacies and authoritative healthcare information and treatment resources, including sites with information on the potentially fatal risks associated with opioid abuse.

- Deindex / delist illegal online pharmacies from organic search results based on information from credible parties (including but not limited to information from the U.S. FDA).
- Use pop-up warning, knowledge panels, and info boxes to educate consumers about illegal online pharmacies, pointing consumers to trusted information and safe alternatives.

ASOP Global applauds the U.S. FDA for bringing stakeholders to the table to discuss the best approaches to addressing the scourge of illegal online drug sales. As announced at the Summit, further interagency cooperation by the U.S. Department of Commerce, [National Telecommunications and Information Administration \(NTIA\)](#), which has influence over U.S. based domain name registries and registrars, and the FDA brings new focus to the Administration's efforts to address this problem on all fronts. ASOP Global commends this novel collaboration. We look forward to working with public, private and nonprofit stakeholders to increase swift, proactive detection and removal of illegal online drug sellers.

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#### **ABOUT ASOP GLOBAL**

*The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP Global), a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. with activities in U.S., Canada, Europe, India, Latin America and Asia, is dedicated to protecting consumers around the world, ensuring safe access to medications, and combating illegal online drug sellers. ASOP Global has an expansive membership including non-profit public health organizations, international members, pharmacy members, as well as pharmaceutical manufacturers.*