

June XX, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Stephen L. Lieberman
Deputy to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough and Dr. Lieberman:

In light of an opioid epidemic that claimed 80,000 American lives last year, we urge the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (“the Department”) to make *all clinically appropriate* non-opioid therapies available to VA health plan participants. In doing so, the Department can prevent opioid addiction and save lives.

Nearly half of combat wounded veterans report misusing prescription opioids. They are not alone. All told, approximately 4 million Americans become newly persistent opioid users every year following exposure to opioids after an acute pain incident such as an accident, sports injury, trauma, or surgery. These prescribed pills are also a dangerous gateway to further illicit opioid use, as 75 percent of heroin users report initiating with prescription opioid pills that were either legally prescribed to them or diverted from someone else’s partially used medication.

Unfortunately, the VA National Formulary (“VANF”) does not include several FDA-approved, safe, and effective non-opioid analgesic products, meaning VA patients have little choice in managing their acute pain symptoms. As a result, the policy embraced by the VANF unnecessarily exposes our nation’s veterans to opioid-based analgesic products. This decision is putting their lives in jeopardy.

We urge VANF to update its coverage policy to make all clinically appropriate non-opioid therapies available to VA patients immediately.

Clinically appropriate non-opioid therapies include products that are:

- Approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and, as such, deemed to be safe and effective;
- Indicated for use in providing analgesic support for acute, postsurgical pain; and
- Proven to reduce quantities of opioids prescribed.

The men and women who serve our country as part of our Armed Services deserve the best of us. This includes setting them up for success after their service. In honor of the sacrifices these brave men and women have made on behalf of our country, we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure they receive the best health benefits we can provide. This includes ensuring they can access the full range of non-opioid analgesic products after surgery.

Because they have earned it.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to working with the Department on this urgent public health need and partnering on preventing opioid addiction.

Sincerely,
Voices for Non-Opioid Choices