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October 31, 2016

Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy, M.D.  
Surgeon General  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Vice Admiral Murthy:

Drug overdose, driven by opioid addiction, is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States. In 2014, the U.S. experienced over 47,000 deaths as a result of overdose deaths related to prescription medicine. Women in particular are at risk for developing an addiction to pain medication. Unfortunately, the problem continues to worsen.

I applaud you for your work this past August in announcing the “Turn The Tide Rx” campaign. This campaign involved sending a letter every physician in the country asking them to help solve the crisis of opioid addiction. While this is an important step, I urge you to also broaden the campaign to reach Americans of all ages. For example, in recent years, your predecessors have issued a “Call to Action” to engage the public on a major public health crisis. I’m sure you will agree that the opioid and heroin epidemics that continue to devastate our country would fall under such a category.

In recent years, the Office of the Surgeon General has issued Calls to Action that have focused on walking and walkable communities (2015) and skin cancer prevention (2014). A Call to Action on opioid addiction and the dangers of opioid overdose could similarly educate the American public on this important health issue.

An alternative approach is to directly engage the American people. In 1964, the Surgeon General released the first report on the dangers of smoking. This report led Congress to pass legislation requiring health warnings on cigarette packages, banned cigarette advertising and encouraged thousands of former smokers to quit smoking. In the 1980s, C. Everett Coop was very aggressive in publicly declaring the dangers of smoking through the “A Smoke-Free Society By the Year 2000” campaign.

In addition to the means you are currently using, you are encouraged to actively use public service announcements (PSAs) so you and your office can educate Americans on this important

issue. Aggressive and vocal action needs to be taken so that, regardless of age, the citizens of our country will understand the dangers of opioid and prescription drug abuse should be taken.

Finally, your office received an invitation on October 26, 2016 from West Liberty University to visit the Ohio Valley so you have the opportunity to speak with members of the Ohio Valley Research Consortium and the general public at large. The consortium members believe your expertise could help guide them in identifying research priorities for the group to pursue. I strongly encourage you to consider this request and hope you will find time to visit the Ohio Valley in the future.

Thank you for your work on this important issue affecting millions of families across our country.

Sincerely,



David B. McKinley, P.E.  
Member of Congress