

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4805

January 11, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW, Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

I write to request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) resume the dissemination of the findings, best practices and supporting materials of the Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force Report (Report), first released in 2019, to front-line practitioners. The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) of 2016, which I was a cosponsor of, mandated the creation of this Task Force to address acute and chronic pain in light of the ongoing opioid and addiction crisis. This Report, and the findings and best practices it contains, will allow these practitioners to understand better the many options to manage pain and allow them to work with their patients to develop individualized treatment plans.

While I well understand the many challenges the Department has faced and continues to face, including the addiction epidemic that continues to devastate my home state, I continue to hear from constituents who are unable to access appropriate treatment for chronic pain. My constituents are sadly not alone, 50 million adults throughout the United States experience chronic daily pain, with 19.6 million adults experiencing high-impact chronic pain that interferes with daily life or work activities. Without access to appropriate care, those living in pain continue to suffer, resulting, in some cases, in illicit drug use and tragically, suicide.

Created in order to prevent such results, the CARA mandated Task Force included members from non-Federal and Federal agencies with expertise across a range of areas relevant to acute and chronic pain management. They engaged with stakeholders during Task Force meetings, and reviewed and analyzed over 9,000 public comments, and testimonials from patients with acute and chronic pain. Over 165 medical organizations submitted letters of support and constructive feedback to the Task Force. As a result, their Report comprehensively identifies gaps and inconsistencies in pain management and offers much needed recommendations for improving pain management best practices.

Unfortunately, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented full dissemination of this valuable report to front-line practitioners who could benefit greatly from it. For the benefit of these practitioners and the millions of patients they serve, I ask the Department begin work to resume dissemination of the findings, best practices and supporting materials of the Report as soon as possible. In addition, I ask that relevant pain management policies and educational tools be updated across all relevant HHS agencies, including the CDC, CMS and SAMHSA.

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I look forward to your reply and hope we can continue to work together on this issue and all of the complex issues surrounding our nation's addiction crisis. Should you have any questions please reach out to Dana Richter (dana_richter@capito.senate.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Moore Capito". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent dot over the 'i' in "Capito".

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator