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COMMITTEE ON ARMED
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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February 24, 2014

Secretary Eric Shinseki
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420-0001

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to inquire as to the status of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts regarding the sharing of VA patient information with state prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs).

Prescription drug abuse, largely due to the misuse of prescription pain medication, is an epidemic raging through communities across the United States, especially southern Ohio. Service members and veterans are particularly susceptible to prescription drug abuse. I understand that since 2001 there has been a 270 percent increase at which VA healthcare providers have prescribed four powerful opiate painkillers. The high use of prescription pain medication will continue as service members and veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, many with serious injuries.

Numerous states have worked to combat prescription drug abuse by developing PDMPs. These statewide electronic databases of prescription-related information assist healthcare providers and law enforcement to identify and prevent prescription drug abuse. Yet, veterans do not only receive healthcare from the private providers that utilize these databases, but also from the VA. Therefore, it is necessary for the VA to facilitate interoperability between the VA and PDMPs in order to better serve our veterans.

In 2011, Congress provided the VA with the authority to develop regulations that would allow the VA to disclose prescription-related information to PDMPs. Yet, as of February 24, 2014, the VA has not promulgated the final rule authorizing disclosure of prescription-related information to PDMPs. Meanwhile the prescription drug epidemic continues to devastate communities, like Scioto and Adams counties in my district. As service members and veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is imperative that the VA finalize this regulation. Therefore, I respectfully request the status of the VA's efforts to promulgate a final rule authorizing this authority.

Furthermore, the organization and structure of PDMPs varies greatly amongst states. As a result, there are growing concerns regarding the VA's ability to develop appropriate technology and

standards to facilitate interoperability between the VA and numerous PDMPs. The VA must ensure that these systems function seamlessly to allow healthcare providers to deliver the care our veterans deserve. Therefore, I respectfully request the status of the VA's efforts to facilitate interoperability with the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) and other state PDMPs.

Thank you for your attention to this inquiry and your service on behalf of our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad R. Wenstrup". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Brad Wenstrup
U.S. Representative

BRW