United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:

Recently, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control (the Caucus) held a hearing entitled, "America's Addiction to Opioids: Prescription Drug and Heroin Abuse," and it was made abundantly clear that our Nation is in the midst of an opioid epidemic. We are writing to request that you increase the cap on the number of patients that each physician is permitted to treat with buprenorphine, a drug used to treat opioid addiction.

As you are likely aware, data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that 2.1 million people in the United States were addicted to prescription opioids, and 467,000 were addicted to heroin in 2012. Nationwide, 16,490 unintentional deaths resulted from prescription drug abuse and 3,000 from heroin.

Given these high rates of abuse and accidental overdose deaths, we were astonished to learn that although 1.5 million doctors are licensed to prescribe opioids, only 2% are authorized to provide buprenorphine to treat opioid addiction. Further compounding the problem, those 2% can only treat a maximum of 100 patients each after their first year, when they can only treat 30 patients. This does not appear to be sufficient given the ongoing epidemic.

It is our understanding that under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000, you have the ability to raise the patient cap administratively. Doing so would increase access to this medication, which has been proven effective. As members of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control and Senators

whose constituents have been gravely impacted by the opioid epidemic, we strongly encourage you to consider exercising this authority as soon as possible.

We thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and request that you immediately provide us with a list of actions you and your agency plan to take, as well as a timeline for implementation to increase access to buprenorphine treatment for opioid addiction.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein

Charles Grassley

Sheldon Whitehouse

Tom Udall

Edward Markey

Cc: Pamela Hyde, Director, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
H. Westley Clark, Director, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration