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Dr. Larry Bucshon, Member of Congress  
Testimony before the Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Health  
Hearing: "Member Day: Testimony and Proposals on the Opioid Crisis"

Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member Green thank you for holding this important hearing today. Opioid abuse disorder has ravaged our communities, and while it is important to look forward and address what else needs to be done to combat this terrible disease, we also need to ensure that the legislation we have already passed is being properly implemented, and is working as intended by Congress.

In July, 2016, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, landmark legislation addressing the opioid abuse crisis, was passed into law.

I spent months convening stakeholder roundtables and tweaking language on a bipartisan agreement, which became section 303 of CARA.

In particular, Section 303 updates the Controlled Substances Act and Office-Based Opioid Addiction Treatment laws by ensuring that patients are offered, and physicians are trained, on all FDA-approved treatments. Under previous law, prior to CARA, millions of opioid-addicted patients had their treatment determined based on their setting of care. With the passage of CARA, patients in these settings must now be offered the full range of treatment options based on their individualized clinical needs.

Unfortunately, 15 months after the legislation was signed into law, Section 303 still has not been implemented. I urge the committee to conduct strong oversight to ensure SAMHSA will be properly implementing the law. Every day that this law goes unimplemented, is one more day that our family members, friends, and colleagues are battling a disease with fragmented and incomplete treatment options.

Specifically, SAMHSA should send a Dear Colleague letter to notify physicians that they must offer all anti-addiction medicines based on a patient's clinical needs. Additionally, curriculum for doctors, PAs, and nurse practitioners should be updated to include training on all FDA-approved opioid addiction medications. Moreover, all of SAMHSA's public facing material should be modernized to reflect this patient-centered approach.

According to the Evansville Courier and Press, 55 people in Vanderburgh County, IN have died of a drug overdose in the first nine months of this year, which is more than all of 2016. The availability of all medication-assisted treatments, regardless of where a patient chooses to seek them, will help to stem the tide of these unnecessary deaths.

It's vital that as the Committee moves forward in the fight against opioid abuse disorder that we ensure the hard work that the Committee has already accomplished is implemented and working.