

## POSITION STATEMENT:

# Pass Legislation To Expand Access To Nonopioid Pain Treatments Among Older Adults

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## SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Society of Behavioral Medicine supports passage of the Alternatives to PAIN Act, to ensure that U.S. older adults can access nonopioid forms of pain management.



## THE PROBLEM

The opioid epidemic is an ongoing public health emergency that costs U.S. taxpayers \$1.5 trillion each year [1]. People of all ages engage in opioid use and misuse, and older adults (age ≥65 years) face unique risks. Despite evidence that chronic opioid therapy has limited effectiveness for chronic pain management and is associated with serious health risks (e.g., overdose deaths, fall risk) among older adults [2-8], opioid use has increased in this population [9] and nearly one-quarter of Medicare Part D beneficiaries received an opioid prescription in 2021 [10]. At the same time, rates of opioid misuse and opioid use disorder (OUD) continue to increase in older adults [11]. Indeed, the prevalence of OUD increased more than 3-fold from 2013 to 2018, with 15.7 out of every 1000 Medicare beneficiaries meeting criteria for OUD in 2018 [12]. These trends are alarming because problematic opioid use can lead to cognitive impairment, sedation, injurious falls, and fractures among older adults [3, 11]. However, one of the challenges to reducing opioid prescriptions among older adults is that alternative pain management approaches are often not accessible.

There is an urgent need for patients, especially those aged 65 years and older who face unique challenges to pain management, to have unrestricted access to nonopioid pain medications. Increasing access to nonopioid pain treatments will optimize chronic pain outcomes in older adults and reduce risk for adverse opioid-related outcomes (e.g., opioid use disorder). Nonopioid pain management approaches provide pain relief with fewer health risks, and research has shown that opioids do not demonstrate any advantages over nonopioid medications for managing chronic pain [13].

## CURRENT POLICY

In 2022, the Non-Opioids Prevent Addiction in the Nation (NOPAIN) Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden. Beginning in 2025, the NOPAIN Act will establish separate reimbursement for nonopioid pain medication in outpatient surgical settings. This will expand access to nonopioid pain treatments and marks a critical step towards incentivizing the use of nonopioid pain management strategies. However, the legislation pertains only to outpatient surgical procedures covered by Medicare Part B.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Support the passage of the Alternatives to PAIN Act, which would establish patient cost-sharing no greater than generic tier for patients receiving nonopioid pain relief under Medicare Part D plans and prohibit utilization of step therapy and prior authorization for nonopioid pain management drugs for Medicare Part D beneficiaries.

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*Endorsing organizations do not write or have any control over position statement content.  
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## ENDORSEMENTS



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