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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

October 14, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
US Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We appreciate the progress the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has made in providing integrative health care to veterans, especially for those living with chronic conditions. These steps are essential for reaching the agency's goals of personalized, proactive, and patient-driven care for America's veterans. As the VHA continues to implement a collaborative treatment approach for chronic pain, we urge you to include licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs), who are trained in the use of safe and effective natural and conventional therapies, in the spectrum of healthcare professionals employed within the agency.


Licensed NDs attend a 4-year, federally accredited post-graduate naturopathic medical school and have passed national licensing exams. Their training emphasizes illness prevention, proactive self-care such as nutrition and stress reduction, and chronic disease treatment aimed at helping the body heal itself. This approach often has the effect of reducing or eliminating the need for drugs or surgery. Given the difficulties many veterans face from taking multiple prescription drugs – such as opioids for chronic pain – the VHA and its patients will greatly benefit by bringing licensed NDs into the system.

As you know, in order for the VHA to bring NDs into the system an appropriate employment code must be assigned. Our understanding is the Department of Veterans Affairs has the authority to assign a new code, giving veterans the opportunity to be treated by a ND.

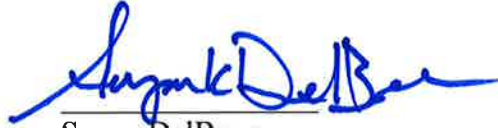
After incidences across the country of veteran's overdosing on or abusing opioids associated with chronic pain, it is clear we need a new approach to veterans' pain management. Our veterans deserve accessibility to all possible forms of care when making their health care decisions, including the services provided by naturopathic physicians. Without an employee code, we are robbing our veterans of access to physicians with expertise in natural therapies without the risk of addiction or overdose.

Making integrative health care available for America's veterans is a clear and present need. We urge the Department to assign licensed naturopathic physicians an appropriate employment code so they can treat our veterans. If you have any questions please reach out to our office at 202-225-2906. We look forward to your response and continued work improving veteran's health care.

Sincerely,



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



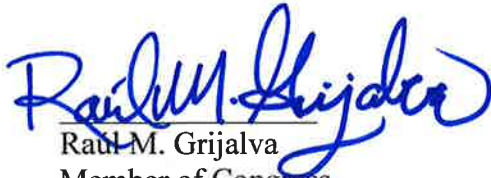
Suzan DelBene
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Earl Blumenauer
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Walter B. Jones
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Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



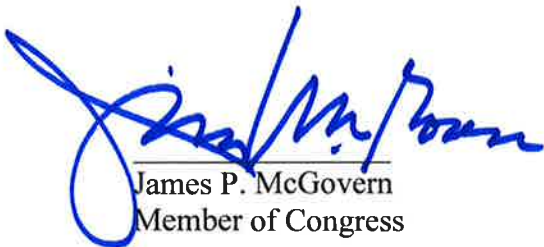
Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress



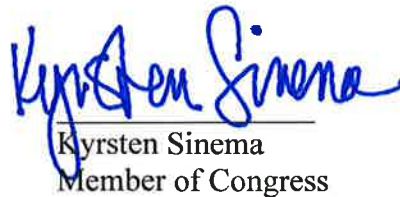
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



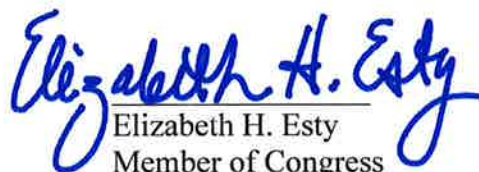
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress



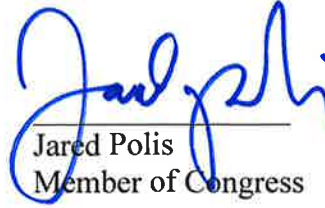
Chellie Pingree
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Member of Congress



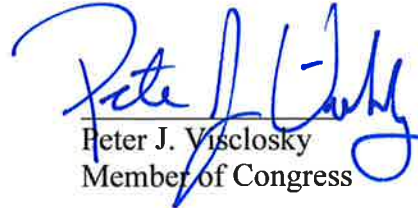
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



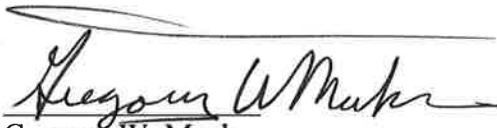
Peter J. Visclosky
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Derek Kilmer
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cc: The Honorable David J. Shulkin, MD
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