

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ON MARCH 8, 2021

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National Pain Advocacy Center Launches Today

New group will advocate for smarter solutions to pain and overdose crises

(Denver, Colorado—March 8): Today marks the formal launch of the **National Pain Advocacy Center (NPAC)**, a group of scientists, clinicians, civil rights advocates, and people with pain. NPAC will fight to remove systemic barriers that block pain patients' access to medication and healthcare.

NPAC takes no pharmaceutical money or funds that may create a conflict of interest.

Pain is the leading cause of disability in the United States. Poorly managed pain costs billions of dollars in lost work hours, and undermines people's ability to lead fulfilling professional, social, or family lives. And yet chronic pain is not treated like a serious disease: for years, we have underinvested in scientific research, treatment, and medical education about pain.

NPAC formed after its members noticed that well-intended efforts to stem opioid prescribing were harming people with pain. People who require these medications to treat serious injuries and conditions were abruptly taken off them, destabilizing their physical and mental health.

Even more alarmingly, many health care providers refuse to see patients who use opioid medication to manage pain, denying them their right to healthcare.

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Opioids should be prescribed cautiously, and optimal pain management usually involves a combination of treatments. But many treatments, from physical and cognitive therapy to chiropractic care, are poorly covered by insurance or otherwise unavailable. And stopping or reducing a patient's medication without their consent, particularly when done abruptly, can be a dangerous practice that the [CDC](#) and [FDA](#) warn against.

While pain can affect anyone, barriers to adequate pain treatment differ hugely: women are more likely to have their pain dismissed or disbelieved, and people of color are more likely to have their pain rated lower by doctors or to be perceived as drug-seekers.

“Pain is a health equity and human rights issue,” said Kate Nicholson, NPAC President and a nationally-recognized expert on civil rights and disability law. “We came together out of concern about limits to prescribed medication, but our goals are broader: to change minds and remove barriers to care so that all people with pain have the opportunity to live full lives without stigma.”

Nicholson, previously a longtime civil rights attorney at the US Department of Justice, developed intractable pain herself after a surgical mishap left her unable to sit or stand and with severely limited ability to walk. Thanks to adequate pain management, including opioids and other treatments, she was able to continue her career.

In addition to advocating for policy change, NPAC serves as a resource for journalists and policymakers: our Science & Policy Council brings together the leading minds in the fields of pain, health policy, human rights and addiction. Our Community Leadership Council, which is made up people living with pain and people in recovery from addiction, ensures that our organization reflects the concerns and amplifies the voices of those we advocate for.

“The overdose epidemic is one of the greatest crises today, but we can't fix it with simplistic policies that block patients' access to medication or healthcare,” said Nicholson. “NPAC aims to find smart solutions to solve the public health crises of pain and addiction— together.”

About the National Pain Advocacy Center (NPAC):

NPAC is a new 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to advance the health and human rights of people in pain. We envision a world in which pain is treated equitably and effectively so all people with pain can live full, productive lives.

About Kate Nicholson, President of NPAC:

Kate Nicholson is a civil rights attorney and a nationally-recognized expert on disability law. She formerly served in the US Department of Justice, where she drafted the current regulations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Kate developed intractable pain after a surgical injury. See her [TEDx talk](#) and more information at katemnicholson.com.

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