

### SAMPLE OP-ED FOR PAM

Do you remember the last time you whacked your elbow on a stray cabinet door or countertop? How badly it hurt, how distracting it was, how you couldn't do anything else but think about the pain?

Now imagine if that pain never went away.

That's what it's like to live with chronic pain. I have lived with daily pain for five years due to a back injury. I'm not alone: an estimated 100 million Americans live with daily pain. That's more than the number of Americans living with heart disease, diabetes and cancer—combined. In terms of impact, chronic pain is the leading cause of long-term disability and its cost (including lost productivity and treatment expenses) is estimated at more than \$635 billion annually.

Pain has affected every aspect of my and my family's life. I can no longer work-full time. A huge portion of our expenses goes toward my health care—meanwhile, many treatments I would like to try remain out of reach financially. My wife and children often must step in to help with household responsibilities, and I frequently have to miss out on spending time with them. I also cannot do the things I used to love, like playing the saxophone and hiking.

Despite the prevalence and consequence of chronic pain, people with pain are widely overlooked and undertreated. People with pain are often labelled as “lazy,” or “attention-seeking,” and not taken seriously. Very few pain nonpharmacological relief treatments, like massage and physical therapy, are fully covered by insurance. And, right now, less than 1 percent of the National Institutes of Health's budget goes toward pain research.

It's no surprise that those living with daily pain are suffering—and not just physically. In one survey, more than half of respondents felt they had little or no control over their pain and more than three quarters reported feeling depressed. In fact, research has shown that chronic pain patients are twice as likely to commit suicide as the average person. I can speak from personal experience: I was severely depressed until I got connected to a support group and began volunteering with the U.S. Pain Foundation.

People with pain, like me, deserve better. My family deserves better. Imagine if we took that \$635 billion in lost productivity and health care costs and invested it in preventive care, new treatments, research, and emotional support for pain patients? In honor of September as Pain Awareness Month, I encourage all Bostonians to join me in advocating for positive change for the pain community. To learn more or get involved, visit [www.uspainawarenessmonth.org](http://www.uspainawarenessmonth.org).

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