

Issue brief: Reports of efforts to help the nation's overdose epidemic

***Updated April 15, 2021**

Despite the COVID-19 global pandemic and the nation's drug overdose epidemic, the American Medical Association also has seen efforts in many states to increase access to evidence-based treatment. The AMA remains greatly concerned by [a continuing number of reports](#) from national, state and local media suggesting increases in opioid- and other drug-related mortality—particularly from illicitly manufactured fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine and cocaine. The AMA also continues to highlight [the latest research and data](#) to help provide evidence-based data and other information to help policymakers undertake meaningful public health interventions.

This new issue brief is focused on positive interventions that are working to help increase access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders, patients with pain and harm reduction efforts. The reports below include news releases, data from multiple and varied sources, including national, state and local public health agencies, advocacy organizations, law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospitals, treatment centers, research journals and others.

This issue brief underscores the need to remove barriers to evidence-based treatment for those with a substance use disorder, for patients with pain, as well as benefits from harm reduction services, including increased access to sterile needle and syringe services and naloxone. Specific recommendations for states:

- [The AMA strongly recommends](#) that all of the flexibilities that have been put in place by DEA during the COVID-19 PHE be kept in place at a minimum until both the COVID-19 and the opioid public health emergencies come to an end.
- Adopt SAMHSA and DEA rules and guidance in-full for the duration of the national emergency—this includes [flexibility for evaluation and prescribing requirements](#) using telemedicine;
- [Support the removal of prior authorization](#), step therapy and other administrative barriers for medications used to treat opioid use disorder
- [Enforce state and federal mental health and substance use disorder parity laws](#)
- [Remove existing barriers for patients with pain](#) to obtain necessary medications. This includes removing arbitrary dose, quantity and refill restrictions on controlled substances; and
- Implement and support harm reduction strategies, including removing barriers to sterile needle and syringe services programs.
- Enhanced data surveillance and evaluation of current policies and outcomes is essential to identify what is working, and then build on those successes.

Stakeholders also may be interested in best practices and policy recommendations for governors, state legislatures, attorneys general, insurance commissioners, state Medicaid officials and other stakeholders in the [AMA and Manatt Health 2020 national policy roadmap](#).

For more information, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org

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National reports

- **CMS Selects Value in Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Demonstration Applicants.** <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-selects-value-opioid-use-disorder-treatment-demonstration-applicants> April 8, 2021 ([List of Value in Treatment Demonstration Selected Applicants](#))
- **Integrating behavioral health and primary care.** <https://www.medicaleconomics.com/view/integrating-behavioral-health-and-primary-care> April 5, 2021
- **Biden Administration Plan Tackles Drug Addiction Crisis.** <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/biden-administration-plan-narrows-in-on-drug-addiction-crisis> March 31, 2021
- **Overcoming Barriers to Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder.** <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2777039> February 25, 2021
- **American Society of Addiction Medicine Public Policy Statement on Advancing Racial Justice in Addiction Medicine.** https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-statements/asam-policy-statement-on-racial-justiced7a33a9472bc604ca5b7ff000030b21a.pdf?sfvrsn=5a1f5ac2_2 February 25, 2021
- **Mental Health: Will it Finally Be an American Legislative Priority?** <https://harvardpolitics.com/mental-health-legislation/> February 23, 2021
- **Bupropion plus naltrexone could work for methamphetamine use disorder.** <https://www.pharmacist.com/article/bupropion-plus-naltrexone-could-work-methamphetamine-use-disorder> February 18, 2021
- **‘Use that money wisely’: Coalition urges governments to spend opioid settlement funds on evidence-based efforts.** <https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2021/01/27/opioids-addiction-money-covid-purdue-jnj/> January 27, 2021
- **Regional public health overdose response projects receive national funding.** <https://www.thepitchkc.com/regional-public-health-overdose-response-projects-receive-national-funding/> January 27, 2021
- **Biden moving to nix Trump plan on opioid-treatment prescriptions.** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/01/25/biden-buprenorphine-waiver/> January 25, 2021
- **Extended Medicaid Coverage Would Help Postpartum Patients With Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.** <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/01/14/extended-medicaid-coverage-would-help-postpartum-patients-with-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder> January 14, 2021
- **HHS Expands Access to Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.** <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/01/14/hhs-expands-access-to-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder.html> January 14, 2021
- **Combination treatment for methamphetamine use disorder shows promise in NIH study.** <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/combination-treatment-methamphetamine-use-disorder-shows-promise-nih-study> January 13, 2021
- **CMS Issues Guidance about Expanded Medicaid Coverage for Treatment of Opioid Use Disorders.** <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/news-alert/cms-issues-guidance-about-expanded-medicaid-coverage-treatment-opioid-use-disorders> and <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/sho20005.pdf> December 30, 2020
- **As a physician and a patient, I’ve seen the damage caused by the stigma of addiction. It must end.** <https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/08/stigma-weaponized-helps-fuel-addiction->

[crisis/](#) December 8, 2020

State-specific news reports and other information

1. Arkansas

- **Opioid treatment and research at center of two UAMS grants.**
<https://talkbusiness.net/2021/02/opioid-treatment-and-research-at-center-of-two-uams-grants/>
February 24, 2021
- **20 overdoses in county since July 2020, 16 Narcan ‘saves’.**
https://www.thedailycitizen.com/news/20-overdoses-in-county-since-july-2020-16-narcan-saves/article_f5834485-d2e0-58b3-af7f-cf8c553d4ada.html January 27, 2021

2. California

- **County Supervisors Overturn Ban on Needle Exchange Program.**
<https://patch.com/california/san-diego/county-supervisors-overtturn-ban-needle-exchange-program> January 26, 2021

3. Colorado

- **Colorado Medicaid extends coverage for substance abuse treatment.**
<https://stateofreform.com/featured/2021/01/colorado-medicaid-extends-coverage-for-substance-abuse-treatment/> January 4, 2021

4. Delaware

- **State allocates first \$700K to treat substance use disorder.**
<https://www.capegazette.com/article/state-allocates-first-700k-treat%20substance-use-disorder/213690> January 5, 2021

5. Illinois

- **DuPage County Jail Confirms Christine Finnigan Will Receive Her Life-Saving Medication.** <https://www.aclu-il.org/en/news/dupage-county-jail-confirms-christine-finnigan-will-receive-her-life-saving-medication> February 26, 2021
- **Emphasizing medical student and physician mental health in the curricula.** <https://end-overdose-epidemic.org/stories/emphasizing-medical-student-and-physician-mental-health-in-the-curricula/> February 1, 2021

6. Kentucky

- **Addiction in the Pandemic: The \$350M Effort to Heal Communities in Opioid Crisis.**
<https://wfpl.org/addiction-in-the-pandemic-the-350m-effort-to-heal-communities-in-opioid-crisis/> February 11, 2021
- **Medical professionals focus on substance abuse, drug overdose epidemic, even through COVID-19.** https://news-expressky.com/news/medical-professionals-focus-on-substance-abuse-drug-overdose-epidemic-even-through-covid-19/article_0caba46c-6224-11eb-ac03-37f1a7aafd31.html January 29, 2021

7. Maine

- **Maine police departments are giving out fentanyl testing strips.**
<https://bangordailynews.com/2021/04/08/news/midcoast/maine-police-departments-are-giving-out-fentanyl-testing-strips/> April 7, 2021
- **Maine receives \$1.4 million to combat Maine’s opioid crisis.**
<https://www.penbaypilot.com/article/maine-receives-14-million-combat-maine-s-opioid-crisis/142885> January 22, 2021

8. Maryland

- **Some people relapsing into substance abuse problems due to COVID-19 pandemic.** <https://www.wbalv.com/article/covid-19-pandemic-relapse-substance-abuse-problems-harford-county-evergreen-treatment-services/35246419#> January 18, 2021

9. Massachusetts

- **Opioid treatment program at RIDOC translates to Mass. prison.** <https://www.newportri.com/story/news/local/2021/03/23/opioid-treatment-program-pioneered-codac-sees-success-massachusetts/4789491001/> March 23, 2021
- **Principles of care established for young adults with substance use disorders.** https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/bmc-poc011521.php January 15, 2021

10. Michigan

- **Mobile health unit brings addiction treatment services to rural areas.** https://www.wnem.com/news/mobile-health-unit-brings-addiction-treatment-services-to-rural-areas/article_ea49a68e-7ade-11eb-be03-4b36ee34246e.html March 1, 2021

11. Minnesota

- **How we're combating substance abuse's deadly link to COVID-19.** <https://www.minnesotamonthly.com/health-covid-19/health-health-covid-19/addiction-rates-worse-covid-19-telehealth/> February 22, 2021
- **New EmPATH Unit at St. Cloud Hospital to help patients with emergency mental health needs.** <https://www.sctimes.com/story/news/local/2021/02/10/new-empath-unit-st-cloud-hospital-help-mental-health-needs/4449218001/> February 10, 2021
- **Washington County Jail begins medication-assisted treatment for opioid abuse.** https://www.presspubs.com/white_bear/news/washington-county-jail-begins-medication-assisted-treatment-for-opioid-abuse/article_b828cc86-6650-11eb-b002-3f578e8acbaa.html February 3, 2021

12. Nebraska

- **Opioid settlement to fund drug abuse treatment and prevention in Neb.** <https://www.3newsnow.com/news/local-news/opioid-settlement-to-fund-drug-abuse-treatment-and-prevention-in-neb> February 11, 2021

13. Nevada

- **Mobile clinic sets out to help the homeless combat addiction.** <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2021/jan/25/mobile-clinic-sets-out-to-help-the-homeless-combat/> January 21, 2021

14. New York

- **Telemedicine Brings Treatment Closer to Rural Patients in Recovery.** <https://wskg.org/news/telemedicine-brings-treatment-closer-to-rural-patients-in-recovery/> February 16, 2021
- **Despite Shortages, Syringe Exchanges Continue to Get Safe Supplies to Participants.** <https://wskg.org/news/despite-shortages-syringe-exchanges-continue-to-get-safe-supplies-to-participants/> February 4, 2021

15. North Carolina

- **Lumbee Tribe uses MAT to fight drug addiction.** <https://news.yahoo.com/lumbee-tribe-uses-mat-fight-045900896.html> February 26, 2021

16. Ohio

- **For Incarcerated Patients Battling Addiction, A New Program Offers Treatment.** <https://www.directrelief.org/2021/03/for-incarcerated-patients-battling-addiction-a-new-program-offers-treatment/> March 25, 2021
- **MetroHealth, Euclid police partnering in new overdose treatment program.** https://www.news-herald.com/news/cuyahoga-county/metrohealth-euclid-police-partnering-in-new-overdose-treatment-program/article_18d034ce-550e-11eb-84b6-4f2788b0900e.html January 17, 2021

17. Pennsylvania

- **Pa. can save lives with an easy policy change: Legalize syringe exchange state-wide now. Editorial.** <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/editorials/pennsylvania-syringe-services-hiv-overdose-harm-reduction-coronavirus-relief-20210325.html> March 25, 2021
- **Wolf Administration Launches Portal To Ensure High-Risk Populations Have Access To Opioid Reversal Medication.** <https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/Health-Details.aspx?newsid=1359> March 23, 2021
- **Gov. Wolf signs renewal of opioid disaster declaration in Pennsylvania.** <https://www.abc27.com/news/opioid-crisis/gov-wolf-signs-renewal-of-opioid-disaster-declaration-in-pennsylvania/> February 9, 2021

18. Rhode Island

- **Mahoney: ‘We’ve lost way too many people’. Community organizations working to combat substance use, overdoses during pandemic.** <https://www.valleybreeze.com/2021-01-27/cumberland-lincoln-area/mahoney-we-ve-lost-way-too-many-people#.YBgghuhKjIU> January 27, 2021

19. Tennessee

- **Vanderbilt researchers studying how transit impacts opioid treatment.** <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/vanderbilt-researchers-studying-how-transit-impacts-opioid-treatment> January 5, 2021

20. Texas

- **Emergency Rule Related to Issuance of Prescriptions Renewed.** <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Emergency-Rule-Related-to-Issuance-of-Prescriptions-Renewed.html?soid=1103464106918&aid=2EGiJRzcSMU> March 2, 2021
- **Texas FQHC develops integrative model to help patients with pain.** <https://end-overdose-epidemic.org/stories/texas-fqhc-develops-integrative-model-to-help-patients-with-pain/> January 29, 2021

21. Vermont

- **Mt Ascutney Hospital addresses opioid crisis with medication assisted treatment and Narcan.** <https://vermontbiz.com/news/2020/december/22/mt-ascutney-hospital-addresses-opioid-crisis-medication-assisted-treatment-and> December 22, 2020

22. Washington

- **Harm-reduction experts offer tips on safe drinking.** <https://newsroom.uw.edu/postscript/harm-reduction-experts-offer-tips-safe-drinking> March 23, 2021

23. Wisconsin

- **With Overdoses At Record Highs, Naloxone Made Available in Boxes Statewide.**
<https://www.wpr.org/overdoses-record-highs-naloxone-made-available-boxes-statewide>
February 22, 2021
- **State will Expand Addiction Recovery Treatment Starting Monday.**
<https://racinecountyeye.com/news-medicaid-addiction-recovery-treatment/> January 29, 2021