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

*Updated June 1, 2021*

Despite the continuing COVID-19 global pandemic and the nation’s worsening 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 and legalizing drug checking supplies.
- **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

- **Access to Treatment for Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder.** [https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/access-to-treatment-for-individuals-with-opioid-use-disorder/](https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/access-to-treatment-for-individuals-with-opioid-use-disorder/) April 21, 2021
- **Overcoming Barriers to Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder.** [https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2777039](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](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/](https://harvardpolitics.com/mental-health-legislation/) February 23, 2021

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The key to treating opioid addiction is to cut the red tape.  

State-specific news reports and other information

1. Alaska
   - State updates guidance for treating opioid use disorders.  
     https://www.ktoo.org/2021/05/21/state-updates-guidance-for-treating-opioid-use-disorders/ May 21, 2021

2. Arizona
   - Gov. Ducey signs bill to help prevent fentanyl overdoses.  
   - AMA urges support for Arizona harm reduction bill.  
   - Banner Phoenix launches new program to combat opioid overdoses.  

3. 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’.  

4. California
   - As fentanyl overdoses spike, county gives public tool to save lives.  
   - The key to treating opioid addiction is to cut the red tape.  

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5. **Colorado**

6. **Delaware**

7. **Florida**

8. **Illinois**

9. **Indiana**

10. **Kentucky**
11. Maine
- Maine police departments are giving out fentanyl testing strips. https://bangordailynews.com/2021/04/08/news/midcoast/mainepolicedepartmentsaregiving-out-fentanyl-testing-strips/ April 7, 2021

12. Maryland

13. Massachusetts

14. Michigan
- Treatment Barrier Falls, but More Remain, for People with Opioid Issues. https://labblog.uofmhealth.org/rounds/treatment-barrier-falls-but-more-remain-for-people-opioid-issues March 21, 2021
- 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

15. Minnesota

16. Nebraska

17. Nevada

18. New Hampshire

19. New Jersey

20. New York

21. North Carolina
• To combat opioid overdose deaths, state officials try medication-assisted therapy with select NC inmates. http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2021/04/12/to-combat-opioid-overdose-deaths-state-officials-try-medication-assisted-therapy-with-select-nc-inmates/ April 12, 2021

22. North Dakota

23. Ohio

24. Oregon

25. Pennsylvania

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26. Rhode Island

27. Tennessee

28. Texas


29. Vermont

30. Washington

31. Wisconsin