

May 22-23, 2018

Promoting Continued Action to Address the Epidemic of Opioid Use

Senators and House members should introduce and pass comprehensive legislation this year that would increase funding and expand access to prevention, education, treatment and recovery efforts designed to combat the opioid epidemic in this country, as described below in the “What is ACP Asking of Congress” section.

What’s it all about?

The United States is in the midst of a deadly epidemic that stems from the misuse and addiction to various forms of opioids. Although health risks posed by opioids have led to a decrease in the prescribing of these substances, individuals have also transitioned to the use of illegal opioid substances such as heroin or fentanyl which can be attributed to an increase in the rate of overdose deaths. According to data released by the CDC, opioids were involved in 42,249 deaths in 2016, and on average 115 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. The burden of this epidemic on our economy is now estimated by the CDC at \$78.5 billion per year due to an increase in health costs, lost productivity, and incarceration.

In March of last year, ACP released a paper, entitled *Health and Public Policy to Facilitate Effective Prevention and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders Involving Illicit and Prescription Drugs* that provides a series of reforms for the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders involving illicit and prescription drugs, particularly opioids. The paper stresses that public policy concerning opioid and drug abuse should be reoriented to emphasize prevention and treatment of substance use disorders through public and individual health interventions rather than excessive criminalization and incarceration.

- [View](#) March 2018 Vital Signs: Trends in Emergency Department Visits for Suspected Opioid Overdoses
- [View](#) ACP position paper: *Health and Public Policy to Facilitate Effective Prevention and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders Involving Illicit and Prescription Drugs*

What’s the current status?

Over the past year, there has been significant activity from both Congress and the Administration in wanting to accelerate efforts to address the ongoing opioid crisis across the country.

President’s Commission: In March 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order establishing a Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, and he appointed former New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, to chair it. In November, the Commission issued its final report detailing its [recommendations](#) that included an expanded drug court system, educational requirements for prescribers, and a media element to spread the word about preventive services and treatment availability for substance use disorders. ACP sent a [response letter](#) to the President that was largely favorable to the Commission’s report.

White House Summit on Opioids: In March 2018, ACP’s governmental affairs staff participated in a White House summit about the opioid crisis where the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs, and the National Drug Czar, presented their visions on the role of the federal government in combatting the opioid crisis. Their belief that opioid and substance abuse should be treated as health issues and the need to reduce the stigma for people who are suffering from a substance use disorder was consistent with ACP’s approach for improving treatment for opioid use disorder.

Congressional Committee Reform Efforts: All of the relevant committees in both chambers that have jurisdiction over opioids-related matters have engaged quite aggressively in 2018 on developing policies to address this

epidemic. This includes the House Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Judiciary Committees, as well as the Senate Finance and HELP Committees. They have all been holding hearings and markups on discussion drafts or introduced bills – seemingly working in parallel with the goal of producing a final opioids legislative package that could be ready for floor consideration in both chambers by Memorial Day. Details surrounding their efforts and what they have produced to date are noted below.

Funding for Opioids: Earlier this year, the Fiscal Year 2018 omnibus appropriations bill was enacted into law and it included roughly \$4.65 billion dollars—a \$3 billion increase—to address the opioid crisis. This increase included \$360 million for programs authorized by the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) of 2016 and \$1.5 billion for the State Target Response to the Opioid Crisis (Opioid STR) grant program from the 21st Century Cures Act. Congress has yet to pass legislation to authorize and appropriate funding for both CARA-related programs and the Opioid STR grant program for Fiscal Year 2019.

Why and how should Congress address this issue?

ACP has been encouraged by the actions taken thus far by Congress and the Administration in trying to address this epidemic, including the following initiatives:

CARA 2.0 Act of 2018 (S. 2456 in the Senate and H.R. 5311 in the House): This legislation, introduced by Sen. Rob Portman (R-PA) and Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), builds on legislation that was signed into law in 2016, by reauthorizing CARA for five additional years and authorizes \$1 billion in dedicated funding to CARA evidence-based prevention, enforcement, and treatment programs to address the opioid crisis. [View](#) ACP’s letter of support for CARA 2.0, with additional recommendations.

The Opioid Crisis Responses Act of 2018 (S. 2680): This legislation, introduced by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) who is also Chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP), would reauthorize the Opioid STR grant program for three more years and help improve Prescription Drug Monitoring Program data sharing, among other things.

House Opioids Package: Both the Energy and Commerce (E&C) and Ways and Means (W&M) Committees have been working in parallel on this issue and have held numerous hearings, which included over 60 different introduced bills or discussion drafts, aimed at improving prevention, education, treatment, and recovery for those suffering from substance use disorders, including opioids addiction. ACP has been actively engaging with these committees throughout the process, and provided specific [feedback](#) on many of the proposals in E&C and W&M.

What is ACP asking of Congress?

We urge Congress to introduce and pass a comprehensive legislative package this year to improve prevention, education, treatment and recovery for those suffering from opioid-related addictions. We urge lawmakers to:

Provide for sufficient and increased funding to address the opioid epidemic, building and expanding upon the \$4.65 billion in the omnibus bill approved by Congress, with at least \$1 billion for programs as authorized by CARA 2.0 of 2018.

Expand access and coverage for medication assisted treatment (methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone) to prevent opioid and substance use disorders.

Reject any proposal to impose a three day prescribing limit for initial opioid prescriptions to ensure that doctors have appropriate flexibility to determine the proper duration of each opioid prescription.

Senators and House members should cosponsor the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act 2.0 of 2018 (S. 2456 in the Senate and H.R. 5311 in the House) as a step toward a more comprehensive opioids-related package that is under development.

Who can I contact to learn more?

advocacy@acponline.org; Digital version of this issue brief can be found at:

<https://www.acpservices.org/leadership-day/policy-priority-issues>