

White House Summit on Opioids
March 1, 2018

Overview

On March 1st, the White House hosted an Opioid Summit to discuss the Administration-wide efforts to combat the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic. A transcript of President Trump's remarks is available [here](#) and an archived webcast can be viewed [here](#).

The summit, moderated by Kellyanne Conway, featured the stories and videos of families of loss. Administration officials who spoke included:

- Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Alex Azar
- Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Ben Carson
- Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) David Shulkin
- Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan
- Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen
- Attorney General Jeff Sessions
- White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Acting Director Jim Carroll

The Administration officials detailed the actions undertaken to confront the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic thus far:

- Directed actions across the entire executive branch designed to target drug addiction and opioid misuse;
- Announced on October 26, 2017 that the opioid crisis is a Nationwide Public Health Emergency; and
- Released a [final report](#) detailing recommendations of The President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis on November 1, 2017. The officials said the Administration has already begun acting on a number of the Commission's recommendations.

Key messages being articulated by the carefully curated videos and pre-selected audience questions included:

- If you are a family of loss or a person in or seeking recovery from addiction the Administration hears and sees you and help is on the way
- Families should move away from the “not my kid” mentality
- Addiction is a brain disease and not a moral failing
- Addiction can happen to anyone and is occurring in every community. It is not someone else’s problem
- Law enforcement is an important tool in this fight and will be deployed in a major way to reduce the number of drug dealers

Panel 1: Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Efforts

HHS Secretary Alex Azar, HUD Secretary Ben Carson, and VA Secretary David Shulkin led the first panel to discuss the below actions that have been taken by the Administration:

- The Administration led a national “Take Back Day” which collected 456 tons of expired and unneeded prescription drugs.
- The VA has reduced opioid use by 41% system-wide and became the first hospital system to release opioid prescribing rates. The VA began publicly posting Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) information on opioids dispensed from VA pharmacies, along with VA’s strategies to prescribe these pain medications appropriately.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is considering new ways to facilitate appropriate prescribing practices.
- The President’s Budget proposes \$10 billion in new funding in 2019 for HHS to combat the opioid epidemic. Of that, \$750 million is for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a public/private partnership to 1) develop prevention and treatments for addiction, overdose-reversal, and non-addictive therapies for pain and 2) serious mental illness and pain-related research.
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released consumer information that will help individuals seeking treatment for opioid dependence or withdrawal.
- SAMHSA awarded \$485 million State Targeted Response grants in FY17 to help States, territories and jurisdictions expand prevention, treatment and recovery support services for individuals with an opioid use disorder.
- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced a new policy that gives States more flexibility to enact demonstration projects that include coverage of inpatient or residential addiction treatment programs in facilities not typically covered by Medicaid. Azar noted that HHS will fast track requests for these waivers.
- FDA approved a new buprenorphine Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder that requires monthly treatment, compared to other treatments requiring daily medication.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Enhanced State Opioid Overdose Surveillance grant program funding went to States to strengthen prevention efforts and better track opioid-related overdoses.
- CDC also funded Prescription Drug Overdose: Prevention for States grants, a program that provides state health departments with resources and support needed to advance interventions for preventing prescription drug overdoses.
- The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is expanding access to substance use disorder treatment services through primary care providers in underserved communities.

Secretary Azar said the Administration intends to treat addiction as a medical illness and not a moral failing. Azar noted the importance of MAT as an integral part of this fight, saying only one third of treatment facilities offer MAT, which is too few, and part of the \$6 billion in funding toward the opioid epidemic will go toward MAT.

Azar reported that five state waivers for the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion have been approved, and he hopes states send HHS more. HHS has also approved new types of state technical assistance on recovery through SAMHSA grants and said we also need to look at our insurance reimbursement systems that do not cover alternative treatments for pain.

Secretary Carson said the human cost of opioids is too high, and “we [HUD] are at the nexus of health housing and economic opportunity.” Carson added that HUD is looking at different regulations to see what can be done regarding Envision Centers, but needs more detail.

Audience member Ryan Hampton from Facing Addiction asked Sec. Carson about recovery housing efforts, who did not give specific details on HUD’s work in that area. A family member who lost a loved one asked about education efforts and Sec. Azar said HHS will be launching a multi-media education and prevention campaign and Carson said Envision centers will also be doing an education campaign.

VA Secretary Shulkin said the VA has reduced opioid use by 41% by severely limiting new opioid prescriptions and have found success in using team based care for the treatment of addiction and instituted recovery self-management programs.

The newly appointed Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Jim Carroll, spoke next. He focused his remarks on families who have lost loved ones and said he himself has a family member affected by this challenge.

Panel 2: Law Enforcement and Interdiction Efforts

Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions led the second panel to discuss the below actions that have been taken by their cabinets.

- Federal law enforcement has fought to curb the illegal importation and distribution of opioids that has helped fuel this epidemic.
- This week AG Sessions announced the creation of the Prescription Interdiction & Litigation (PIL) Task Force, which will focus on targeting opioid manufacturers and distributors who have contributed to the epidemic.
- In January, Sessions announced a new Joint Criminal Opioid Darknet Enforcement (J-CODE) Team tasked with helping law enforcement disrupt online sales of illicit opioids.
- The Department of Justice (DOJ) launched a health care fraud crackdown that charged more than 400 defendants, including more than 120 for their role in unlawfully prescribing and distributing opioids and other narcotics.
- DOJ secured indictments against Chinese fentanyl manufacturers.
- The President signed the INTERDICT Act on January 10, 2018, authorizing to DEA enhance efforts to detect and interdict the supply of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl that are being illegally imported.

President Trump then came to the stage and said a few words on the toll of the opioid epidemic on this country and its families. He introduced his friend Steve Witkoff, who lost his son to overdose, and

emphasized the need to punish drug pushers and dealers and penalize opioid companies. He said that he will be rolling out a policy plan to address these issues in the next three weeks.

Conclusion

The 3-week timeline for the release of new Administration policy announcements on the opioid epidemic could not be confirmed by agency representatives as of press time. With or without further Administration announcements, Congress is moving forward on legislative packages to address the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic with the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee aiming to mark up legislation by the end of March and the House Energy and Commerce Committee wanting to have a bill ready for Floor action by Memorial Day.

Also playing a role in the timing of the Summit was a letter from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) by leading Senate Democrats asking them to investigate the Trump Administration's activities on the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic, which GAO agreed to begin in 6 months.