

**November 2017 Newsletter**  
**Prepared by Van Scoyoc Associates**

**OPIOID COMMISSION RELEASES FINAL REPORT**

On November 1, the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis released their final report. Read the full report [here](#).

**CMS ANNOUNCES NEW MEDICAID POLICY TO COMBAT OPIOID CRISIS**

On November 1, the Trump administration [issued](#) new guidance to states on how Medicaid waivers can be used to expand coverage for substance abuse treatment as part of the president's agency-wide response to the opioid epidemic.

**POLITICO WORKING GROUP REPORT**

On November 1, a POLITICO working group released a report calling for more guidelines on opioid prescribing and additional training for doctors. Read the report [here](#).

**FDA EVALUATING OXYMORPHONE**

On November 3, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb raised concerns about the addictive risks of oxymorphone and signaled possible FDA regulatory action to limit patient exposure. Read more [here](#).

**ADVOCATES LOOK TO MAKE OPIOIDS A TOP ISSUE IN THE 2018 MIDTERMS**

Former Rep. Patrick Kennedy is working with advocacy groups and former Surgeons General Vivek Murthy and David Satcher on an effort to hold current lawmakers accountable on their response to the opioid crisis ahead of the 2018 midterm elections. Read more [here](#).

**GAO REPORT: CMS TRACKING MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES AT RISK OF OPIOID ABUSE**

According to a GAO [report](#) released on November 6, CMS failed to identify hundreds of thousands of seniors using prescription painkillers who are at risk of becoming addicted to the pills. GAO's recommendations can be found [here](#).

**FEDERAL SPENDING ON URINE DRUG TESTS TOPS \$8.5 BILLION PER YEAR**

According to a Kaiser Health News investigation, spending on urine screens and related genetic tests focused on controlling opioid abuse quadrupled between 2011 to 2014. Read more [here](#).

**PHARMACIES, PBMs, INSURERS CALL FOR OPIOID PRESCRIPTION POLICY CHANGES**

In a November 8 letter to the President, a coalition of high-profile leaders say they're combining efforts and resources to reduce opioid misuse, such as supporting CDC's recent guidelines for prescribing opioids to people in chronic pain. Read more [here](#).

**RECORD NUMBER OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS COLLECTED ON TAKE BACK DAY**

More than 900,000 pounds of prescription drugs were [collected](#) during the 14th Prescription Drug Take Back Day organized by the Drug Enforcement Administration. The event came a few days after Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency.

**SENATORS UNVEIL BILL TO CHANGE THE WAY HHS DISTRIBUTES OPIOID FUNDING**

A bipartisan group of senators from states hit hardest by the opioid crisis introduced a measure that instructs the Trump administration to prioritize funds appropriated by Congress for addiction treatment and prevention programs to high-need states. Read more [here](#).

### **OPIOID AMENDMENT APPROVED IN DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL**

The House-passed Conference Report for the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included an amendment authored by Congresswoman Annie Kuster (D-NH), founder and co-chair of the Heroin Task Force, that will direct the Department of Defense (DoD) to study the opioid prescribing practices and training of DoD physicians. Read more [here](#).

### **ADMINISTRATION PLANS TO TEMPORARILY SCHEDULE ALL FENTANYL RELATED SUBSTANCES**

On November 9, the Justice Department [announced](#) that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) intends to temporarily schedule all fentanyl-related substances on an emergency basis. Read more [here](#).

### **ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE LETTER TO DEA**

On November 15, Energy and Commerce Committee leaders sent a [letter](#) to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regarding imported and domestic illicit fentanyl. The letter stated that when manufactured using pill presses, thousands of pills containing fentanyl can be manufactured in an hour.

### **ALTARUM INSTITUTE: OPIOID CRISIS COST \$95 BILLION LAST YEAR**

According to an analysis by the Altarum Institute, the opioid epidemic cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$95 billion last year in lost worker productivity, health care services and expenses tied to the criminal justice system. Read the report [here](#).

### **OPIOID CRISIS ECONOMIC EFFECT**

On November 20, the White House released a new economic analysis concluding that the cost of the opioid crisis was \$504 billion in 2015, an estimate that translates to nearly 3 percent of GDP and is significantly higher than previous projections. Read more [here](#).

### **FDA ISSUES FINAL GUIDANCE TO HELP DEVELOP GENERIC VERSIONS OF ABUSE-DETERRENT OPIOIDS**

On November 21, the FDA [issued a final guidance](#) to help develop generic versions of abuse-deterrent opioids as part of its effort to transition the painkiller market toward formulations with properties such as being difficult to crush or dissolve. Read FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb's statement [here](#).

### **TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH REPORT**

The Trust for America's Health issued a report on November 21 saying there could be nearly 2 million deaths caused by suicide and drug and alcohol use over the next decade in the United States if current trends continue. Read the report [here](#).

### **TRUMP SIGNS VA PRESCRIPTION-DRUG DATABASE BILL**

On November 29, a bill (H.R. 1545) explicitly requiring the Veterans Health Administration to disclose information to state-controlled substance monitoring programs for anyone - veteran or non-veteran - who is prescribed these medications through the VA was sent to President Trump's desk. Read more [here](#).

### **ROUNDTABLE ON DEA ENFORCEMENT OVER DRUG DISTRIBUTORS**

On November 28, Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO), the top Democrat on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, held a roundtable discussion on the DEA's power to bring enforcement actions against opioid distributors accused of wrongdoing. Read more [here](#).

### **OPIOID FIELD HEARING**

On November 28 the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held an opioid field hearing at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. At the hearing, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie told lawmakers that it's up to them to hold the Trump administration accountable for addressing the opioid crisis and called on Congress to appropriate additional funding to improve the federal response. More information can be found [here](#).

### **SESSIONS ANNOUNCES NEW ACTIONS TO COMBAT OPIOID CRISIS**

On November 29, Attorney General Jeff Sessions unveiled new steps to address the drug epidemic. Read more [here](#).

### **FDA FORMS NICOTINE STEERING COMMITTEE**

On November 29 the FDA announced they are forming a new Nicotine Steering Committee that will reevaluate and modernize how the agency develops and regulates nicotine replacement therapy products. The committee's first action is a public hearing [scheduled](#) for January 26, 2018, that will cover how the agency evaluates nicotine replacement therapies. Read more [here](#).

### **HEARING ON AZAR NOMINATION TO BE HHS SECRETARY**

On November 29, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing on the nomination of Alex Azar to lead the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH) asked Azar if he would push Trump to request additional funding to fight the opioid crisis. Azar said he would assess whether the government has the resources it needs, and if it doesn't, he'd work with the President and Congress to secure more funding. Mr. Azar's full statement for the record is available [here](#).

### **SENATE HEARING ON OPIOID CRISIS**

On November 30, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing entitled, The Front Lines of the Opioid Crisis: Perspectives from States, Communities and Providers. More information can be found [here](#).

### **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CURES IMPLEMENTATION HEARING**

On November 30, the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee held a hearing on the implementation of the 21st Century Cures Act. Witnesses included Dr. Francis Collins from the NIH and Dr. Scott Gottlieb from the FDA. A webcast of the hearing and witness statements can be found [here](#).

### **HEARING ON OPIOIDS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, two of the House Education and Workforce Committee's Subcommittees – Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education and Workforce Development – held a hearing on how opioids are impacting communities. More information can be found [here](#).

### **TRUMP DONATES THIRD-QUARTER SALARY TO HHS OPIOID EFFORTS**

On November 30, the White House announced that the president has donated his third-quarter presidential salary to HHS's efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Read more [here](#).