

December 2017 Newsletter
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PUBLIC SEES OPIOID ABUSE AS MAJOR PROBLEM BUT NOT EMERGENCY

According to a POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll, forty-one percent of adults think Trump's recent proposals to combat the epidemic were "about right," while 27 percent said they do too little. Just more than half of those surveyed (53 percent) said they believe the opioid epidemic is a "major problem" but not a national emergency. Read more [here](#).

FUNDING TO ADDRESS THE OPIOID CRISIS

On December 4, Acting HHS Secretary Eric Hargan signaled that President Trump will let Congress decide whether to appropriate new funding to address the opioid crisis. Trump declared the crisis a public health emergency in October but did not request additional resources, though public health experts say states need billions of new dollars to fight the epidemic. Read more [here](#).

SENATOR WARREN SEEKS CLARITY ON WHITE HOUSE COUNSELOR'S ROLE

On December 4, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) asked White House chief of staff John Kelly to clarify how presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway is coordinating efforts to combat the opioid crisis. In a letter Warren also queried Kelly about the Trump administration's timeline for nominating a director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Read more [here](#).

HOSPITALS REPORT SPIKE IN OPIOID DEATHS

According to a new Health Affairs [study](#), deaths from opioid-driven hospitalizations quadrupled between 2000 and 2014, with mortality rising to about 2 percent of all opioid hospitalizations, including the emergency department. Read more [here](#).

SENATE LABOR HHS HEARING ON OPIOID CRISIS

On December 5th, the Senate, Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee held a [hearing](#) entitled, "Addressing the Opioid Crisis in America: Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery." Subcommittee Chairman Roy Blunt (R-MO) said fighting the opioid epidemic is a priority and that his committee may reconsider if new money becomes available as part of ongoing budget negotiations. NIH Director Francis Collins told the committee that his agency, which is currently spending about \$116 million on opioids research, would need to multiply that by "at least a factor of four or five" to sufficiently respond. Read more [here](#).

HHS SYMPOSIUM TO TACKLE OPIOID CRISIS

On December 6, HHS held a [symposium](#) and kicked off a 24-hour code-a-thon dedicated to the opioid crisis. The event aimed to develop new tools to prevent addiction, track usage and enable treatment of opioid abuse. Read more [here](#).

21ST CENTURY CURES IMPLEMENTATION HEARING

On December 7, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee 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. Senators Alexander and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) used the hearing to press Dr. Collins on the use of other transaction authority (OTA) to move faster on research connected to the opioid epidemic. More information can be found [here](#).

FDA SEEKS FEEDBACK ON PROPOSALS TO LIMIT OPIOID PRESCRIBING

On December 11, the Food and Drug Administration announced in the [Federal Register](#) that they will hold a public meeting January 30 to receive stakeholder input on how FDA might, under its Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) authority, improve the safe use of opioid analgesics by curbing overprescribing to decrease the occurrence of new addictions and limit misuse and abuse of opioid analgesics.

JAMA INTERNAL MEDICINE ANALYSIS OF ABUSE-DETERRENT OPIOIDS

According to a new analysis in JAMA Internal Medicine, promoting opioids that are more difficult to abuse could have the unintended effect of pushing people toward substances like heroin. Read more [here](#).

PHRMA, ADDICTION GROUP TEAM UP ON OPIOIDS

On December 12, PhRMA said it would collaborate with the Addiction Policy Forum in a new [effort](#) to address the opioid crisis while endorsing limiting the supply of opioid medications to seven days and mandated training for doctors and other prescribers. PhRMA released an expanded set of policy [platforms](#) that include actions it has previously supported aimed at limiting the supply of prescription painkillers when appropriate. The trade group said it's also working to establish a partnership with NIH and NIDA and its member companies to accelerate the development of new addiction treatments. Read more [here](#).

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HEARING

On December 12, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on *Oversight of the Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act*. More information [here](#).

HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE HEARING

On December 12, the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing on patient brokering and addiction treatment fraud. More information [here](#).

HHS SECRETARY HOLDS HIGH LEVEL OPIOIDS MEETING

On December 12, Health and Human Services Acting Secretary Eric Hargan held a meeting with leaders from across the healthcare and human services components of HHS to discuss strategies for addressing America's opioid crisis. Read more [here](#).

SENATE HELP COMMITTEE HEARING

On December 13, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing on the implementation of the mental health title of the 21st Century Cures Act. Read more [here](#).

TEEN OPIOID MISUSE AT HISTORIC LOWS

The NIH's annual survey of teen health habits shows that teenagers are misusing opioids at historically low rates. At the same time, nearly 1 in 3 high school seniors have used some kind of vaping device and daily marijuana use now ranks as more popular than daily cigarette smoking, the NIH's National Institute on Drug Abuse found. See the full survey [here](#).

HIV-OPIOID LINK

In Massachusetts, health officials are alarmed about a recent spike in HIV cases among some drug users, warning that the opioid crisis threatens to undo hard-fought gains in reducing the number of HIV and AIDS cases in the state. Read more [here](#).

HHS OPIOID AUDIT

The inspector general for the Department of Health and Human Services announced that they are going to start digging into the details of how states are using federal cash for programs that monitor drug prescribing. The audit will focus on states where opioid overdoses are particularly common and will look into whether states are following federal requirements as they spend the extra money. Read more [here](#).

HHS HIGHLIGHTS OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS ONGOING RESPONSE TO OPIOID CRISIS

On December 18, the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) launched an array of new tools and initiatives in response to the opioid crisis, while implementing the 21st Century Cures Act. Read more [here](#).

WORKERS IN POOR COUNTRIES HAVE HIGHER RATE OF OPIOID USE

Working adults living in low-income counties had much higher rates of long-term opioid use than those in high-income counties, according to a [study](#) by the Health Care Cost Institute.

CDC REPORT

CDC issued a [report](#) on December 21 that found that drug overdoses killed 63,600 Americans in 2016, a 21 percent increase from the prior year driven by a doubling in the rate of deaths from synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

SENIORS FACE BARRIER FOR COMMON OPIOID ADDICTION TREATMENT

Millions of older Americans are addicted or at high risk of becoming addicted to prescription painkillers, but Medicare doesn't cover one of the most common treatments to wean people off opioids. Policy experts and advocates say one of the biggest barriers to addiction treatment for seniors is Medicare's exclusion of coverage for methadone. Read more [here](#).

WHITE HOUSE DRUG POLICY OFFICE RELEASES COMMISSION REPORT REACTION DOCUMENTS

On December 29, the Trump administration issued a summary of its 2017 actions to fight the opioid crisis. The White House also released its formal response to the president's opioids commission. More information can be found [here](#).

TAX BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

On December 22, President Trump signed into law the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (HR 1). The bill adjusts tax rates and tax expenditures to the tune of \$1.5 trillion in new deficits over the next 10 years. Read more [here](#).

CONTINUING RESOLUTION

On December 22, President Trump signed into law another short-term continuing resolution to keep the government open through January 19. Read more [here](#).