

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

***Updated February 2, 2021**

Despite the COVID-19 global pandemic and the nation's 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 [an increasing 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 research](#) to help provide evidence-based data and other information to help policymakers undertake meaningful public health interventions.

This new issue brief is focused on solutions and other 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.
- 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

- **‘Use that money wisely’: Coalition urges governments to spend opioid settlement funds on evidence-based efforts.** <https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2021/01/27/opioids-addiction-money-covid-purdue-jnj/> January 27, 2021
- **Regional public health overdose response projects receive national funding.** <https://www.thepitchkc.com/regional-public-health-overdose-response-projects-receive-national-funding/> January 27, 2021
- **Biden moving to nix Trump plan on opioid-treatment prescriptions.** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/01/25/biden-buprenorphine-waiver/> January 25, 2021
- **Extended Medicaid Coverage Would Help Postpartum Patients With Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.** <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/01/14/extended-medicaid-coverage-would-help-postpartum-patients-with-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder> January 14, 2021
- **HHS Expands Access to Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.** <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/01/14/hhs-expands-access-to-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder.html> January 14, 2021
- **Combination treatment for methamphetamine use disorder shows promise in NIH study.** <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/combination-treatment-methamphetamine-use-disorder-shows-promise-nih-study> January 13, 2021
- **CMS Issues Guidance about Expanded Medicaid Coverage for Treatment of Opioid Use Disorders.** <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/news-alert/cms-issues-guidance-about-expanded-medicaid-coverage-treatment-opioid-use-disorders> and <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/sho20005.pdf> December 30, 2020
- **As a physician and a patient, I’ve seen the damage caused by the stigma of addiction. It must end.** <https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/08/stigma-weaponized-helps-fuel-addiction-crisis/> December 8, 2020

State reports

1. **Arkansas**
 - **20 overdoses in county since July 2020, 16 Narcan ‘saves’.** https://www.thedailycitizen.com/news/20-overdoses-in-county-since-july-2020-16-narcan-saves/article_f5834485-d2e0-58b3-af7f-cf8c553d4ada.html January 27, 2021
2. **California**
 - **County Supervisors Overturn Ban on Needle Exchange Program.** <https://patch.com/california/san-diego/county-supervisors-overturn-ban-needle-exchange-program> January 26, 2021
3. **Colorado**
 - **Colorado Medicaid extends coverage for substance abuse treatment.** <https://stateofreform.com/featured/2021/01/colorado-medicaid-extends-coverage-for-substance-abuse-treatment/> January 4, 2021
4. **Delaware**

- **State allocates first \$700K to treat substance use disorder.**
<https://www.capegazette.com/article/state-allocates-first-700k-treat%20substance-use-disorder/213690> January 5, 2021
5. **Illinois**
 - **Emphasizing medical student and physician mental health in the curricula.** <https://end-overdose-epidemic.org/stories/emphasizing-medical-student-and-physician-mental-health-in-the-curricula/> February 1, 2021
 6. **Kentucky**
 - **Medical professionals focus on substance abuse, drug overdose epidemic, even through COVID-19.** https://news-expressky.com/news/medical-professionals-focus-on-substance-abuse-drug-overdose-epidemic-even-through-covid-19/article_0caba46c-6224-11eb-ac03-37f1a7aafd31.html January 29, 2021
 7. **Maine**
 - **Maine receives \$1.4 million to combat Maine’s opioid crisis.**
<https://www.penbaypilot.com/article/maine-receives-14-million-combat-maine-s-opioid-crisis/142885> January 22, 2021
 8. **Maryland**
 - **Some people relapsing into substance abuse problems due to COVID-19 pandemic.**
<https://www.wbalv.com/article/covid-19-pandemic-relapse-substance-abuse-problems-harford-county-evergreen-treatment-services/35246419#> January 18, 2021
 9. **Massachusetts**
 - **Principles of care established for young adults with substance use disorders.**
https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/bmc-poc011521.php January 15, 2021
 10. **Nevada**
 - **Mobile clinic sets out to help the homeless combat addiction.**
<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2021/jan/25/mobile-clinic-sets-out-to-help-the-homeless-combat/> January 21, 2021
 11. **Ohio**
 - **MetroHealth, Euclid police partnering in new overdose treatment program.**
https://www.news-herald.com/news/cuyahoga-county/metrohealth-euclid-police-partnering-in-new-overdose-treatment-program/article_18d034ce-550e-11eb-84b6-4f2788b0900e.html
 January 17, 2021
 12. **Rhode Island**
 - **Mahoney: ‘We’ve lost way too many people’. Community organizations working to combat substance use, overdoses during pandemic.** <https://www.valleybreeze.com/2021-01-27/cumberland-lincoln-area/mahoney-we-ve-lost-way-too-many-people#.YBggghuhKjIU>
 January 27, 2021
 13. **Tennessee**
 - **Vanderbilt researchers studying how transit impacts opioid treatment.**
<https://www.newschannel5.com/news/vanderbilt-researchers-studying-how-transit-impacts-opioid-treatment> January 5, 2021
 14. **Texas**

- **Texas FQHC develops integrative model to help patients with pain.** <https://end-overdose-epidemic.org/stories/texas-fqhc-develops-integrative-model-to-help-patients-with-pain/> January 29, 2021

15. Vermont

- **Mt Ascutney Hospital addresses opioid crisis with medication assisted treatment and Narcan.** <https://vermontbiz.com/news/2020/december/22/mt-ascutney-hospital-addresses-opioid-crisis-medication-assisted-treatment-and> December 22, 2020

16. Wisconsin

- **State will Expand Addiction Recovery Treatment Starting Monday.** <https://racinecountyeye.com/news-medicaid-addiction-recovery-treatment/> January 29, 2021