

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

April 30, 2021



National

[Biden administration eases restrictions on prescribing treatment for opioid addiction](#)

Washington Post

The Biden administration released guidelines Tuesday to make it easier for doctors and other healthcare practitioners to prescribe the drug buprenorphine to treat opioid addiction, softening restrictions widely criticized as hampering the response to the opioid epidemic.

The change means that doctors, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other providers of care no longer will need to undergo training before they are allowed to prescribe a form of treatment known to reduce overdose deaths. Studies have shown that people taking the medication are less likely to develop HIV or hepatitis C, or to be unemployed or imprisoned.

In announcing the altered rules, administration health officials emphasized that fostering medication-assisted treatment is especially important because opioid addictions and deaths have ratcheted up during the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

National

[Practice Guidelines for the Administration of Buprenorphine for Treating Opioid Use Disorder](#)

Department of Health and Human Services

The *Practice Guidelines for the Administration of Buprenorphine for Treating Opioid Use Disorder* provides eligible physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and certified nurse midwives, who are state licensed and registered by the DEA to prescribe controlled substances, an exemption from certain statutory certification requirements related to training, counseling and other ancillary services (*i.e.*, psychosocial services).

National

[New study looks at medication assisted drug treatment after Medicaid expansion](#)

WHYY

Nationwide, about half of all people with opioid use disorder say they've had some contact with the criminal justice system.

In 2016, a group of [researchers](#) studying people released from prison in Washington state found that in the two weeks after leaving prison those individuals were 12.7 times more likely to die than someone who had not been incarcerated. Drug overdose was the leading cause of death. Another [study](#) in North Carolina found that people who had been released were 40 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose in the two weeks after their release.

[Dr. Utsha Khatri, an emergency room physician and researcher at the University of Pennsylvania] and her co-authors wanted to know if better access to insurance would improve access to treatment. Over the course of their study which looked at admissions to treatment facilities from 2008 to 2017, more people in general were referred to medicine for opioid use disorder. The researchers compared states that chose to expand Medicaid coverage with those that did not, and looked at the outcomes of more than 3 million people.

“We found that in the states that expanded Medicaid, the use of medications for opioid use disorder went up,” said Dr. Tyler Winkelman, a physician-researcher at Hennepin Healthcare in Minneapolis and a co-author of the study. In 2013, under the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid expanded to cover more people. In states that expanded Medicaid, the percentage of people being referred by the criminal justice system went from 6.3% before expansion to 16.5% after. In states that did not expand coverage, referrals stayed fairly constant.

National

[J&J, other drugmakers go to trial in California in \\$50 bln case over ‘deadly legacy’ of opioids](#)

Reuters

Four drugmakers helped cause the deadly U.S. opioid epidemic by deceptively marketing their drugs and downplaying their addictive risks, a lawyer for several California counties argued on Monday at the start of a multibillion-dollar trial.

Those counties accuse Johnson & Johnson ([JNJ.N](#)), Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd ([TEVA.TA](#)), Endo International Plc ([ENDP.O](#)) and AbbVie Inc's ([ABBV.N](#)) Allergan unit of fueling a drug crisis that according to the U.S. government resulted in nearly 500,000 opioid overdose deaths over two decades.

The populous Santa Clara, Los Angeles, and Orange counties and the city of Oakland say that should a judge following the non-jury, virtual trial find the drugmakers liable, they should have to pay more than \$50 billion to cover the costs of abating the public nuisance they created, plus penalties.

Illinois

[‘We were blown away to see the success’: Jail drug treatment program slashes post-incarceration overdoses](#)

Greater Milwaukee News

During one recent counseling session held in a small room off the cell block, a dozen men in orange jumpsuits sat in a circle as [Nate Lanthrum, clinical director of the Lighthouse Recovery treatment center in St. Charles] and trauma specialist Rehna Becker led them through a fast-paced, occasionally salty discussion about the negative emotions that can drive drug use.

After one man celebrated his transfer to drug court, a move that would prompt a quicker release from custody, he expressed concern about staying on the right path. A fellow inmate jumped in.

“You’re not letting anybody down because you’re in (the treatment program),” he said. “We’ve seen the growth. Don’t let the person in the mirror be your biggest adversary. You got this, bro.”

Louisiana

[Attorney General Jeff Landry praises lawmakers for bipartisan support to reduce crime, taxpayer costs and overdose deaths.](#)

Attorney General’s Office

Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry issued the following statement praising the Louisiana Senate for passing SB 145 – legislation that would quickly identify individuals with substance use disorders who become involved in the criminal justice system and hopefully provide early intervention and treatment:

“In an overwhelming, bipartisan manner – the Louisiana Senate voted to repair the damage caused by the opioid epidemic and improve the safety of all our State’s citizens. By creating a Drug and Specialty Court fund in the state treasury – Louisiana would be able to accept deposit of any compensation recovered from opioid manufacturers, marketers, and sellers who stoked the fire of the epidemic then disbursing those monies to state and local entities providing and enabling treatment courts across our State. By working together, Republican and Democrat – we are one step closer to investing the settlements, judgments, and penalties recovered by our State as a result of the opioid crisis into saving resources, lives, and families across Louisiana. I applaud the Senate for passing this common-sense legislation and trust the House will soon follow their lead.”

Maryland

[There is no vaccine for the opioid epidemic/commentary](#)

Baltimore Sun

The pandemic has dangerously exacerbated the opioid crisis. COVID-19 has left people isolated, stressed and depressed, all triggers that can contribute to individuals using substances like opioids. While access to treatment via telehealth has increased for some, for others, treatment options that were already too costly and difficult to get before the pandemic have become even harder to find.

The growing toll of these effects is clear. [For example,] in Allegany County, [opioid-involved overdose deaths have increased by as much as 111%](#). Most recently, [CDC data](#) show that overdoses throughout Maryland increased by 18.7%, while Western Maryland experienced a 45.9% increase in overdose deaths compared to 2019. It's the same story all over the country. The Centers for Disease Control [totaled more than 87,000 drug overdose deaths](#) in the 12 months ending in September of last year. That's the highest [number] ever recorded in a single 12-month period.

To help solve this worsening crisis, several things need to happen immediately. Congress must dedicate long-term funding for treatment and for emergency medical services like naloxone. Groups like the [Freshmen Working Group on Addiction](#) and the Bipartisan Opioid Task Force are working on policies that would do this. For instance, the State Opioid Response Grant Authorization Act would provide \$9 billion over six years to respond to the opioid epidemic. [Efforts](#) to increase funding for mental health and substance use disorder in COVID-19 stimulus packages has also received bipartisan, bicameral support.

Michigan

[Michigan sees spike in opioid-related overdose deaths during pandemic](#)

WXII

We're taking a deep look into how the COVID-19 pandemic is fueling Michigan's opioid crisis. The state is reporting an increase in overdose deaths, including in metro Detroit.

New York

[Calls grow for state to use money from opioid settlement for treatment and prevention, not general use](#)

News 12

There's a political tug of war going on in Albany over money the state received from a court settlement against pharmaceutical companies that produce opioids.

Drug treatment advocates and families of people who died from opioids are outraged. They are demanding that all future monies be used only for drug treatment and prevention.

New York

[Dutchess County launches opioid diversion court](#)

Mid-Hudson News

A specialized part in Beacon City Court tailored to eligible offenders at high risk of opioid overdose, providing the at-risk population immediate access to community-based resources, has been launched.

The program will offer lifesaving treatment and support services.

The Beacon Recovery Court is a pre-plea diversion program targeting nonviolent offenders with a substance use disorder who live in Dutchess County and are willing to engage in treatment and comply with the terms of the court's recovery program.

Persons charged with or who have a criminal history of assault, domestic violence, sex crimes, a crime against a child, arson, violent felonies, criminal sale of a controlled substance or criminal contempt are ineligible for participation.

Eligible defendants who opt to undergo screening and are found to be at high risk will have the case proceed in the Beacon Recovery Court and admitted into judicially monitored treatment with the district attorney suspending prosecution of the case during the stabilization process.