



Bipartisan Policy Center

Combating the Opioid Crisis: 'Smarter Spending' to Enhance the Federal Response

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On November 2021, the CDC released provisional data showing that the U.S. had surpassed 100,000 drug overdose deaths in a 12-month period. At the same time, the FY2022 appropriations bill included record-high spending for opioid-related programs, and significantly greater expenditures through the Medicaid and Medicare programs. With treatment options still out-of-reach for many Americans and overdoses from fentanyl and synthetic opioids climbing, policymakers remain unsure whether recent investments in opioid-related programs are having an impact. With so many preventable lives lost to the opioid crisis to date, it is of high national interest to target funding in a sustainable manner and overcome regulatory and legislative barriers to address the needs of vulnerable populations affected by opioid use disorder (OUD).

OPIOID OVERDOSES

**81%
more**

overdoses among Blacks and Native Americans since 2019, according to the CDC.

**67%
more**

overdose deaths in the West since 2019, according to the CDC.

OPIOID-RELATED SPENDING

**\$23
billion**

in estimated Medicaid spending for opioid-related treatment.

**> \$6.7
billion**

appropriated for opioid-related programs in FY2022.

The recommendations in this report focus on understanding the extent to which federal funding can be used effectively and what an ideal federal response to the opioid epidemic should focus on. For each of these four policy areas, BPC has noted the overarching challenges to be addressed followed by the corresponding recommendations.

FOUR POLICY AREAS FOR SMARTER FEDERAL SPENDING



MANDATORY SPENDING

Aims to leverage funds more fully from Medicare, Medicaid, and the Marketplace.



DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

Focuses on evidence-based and coordinated funding.



DATA REPORTING AND METRICS

Identifies metrics that could be more uniform and actionable, and opportunities for more frequent reporting.



GOVERNANCE

Targets federal leadership and executive branch-wide coordination and accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Opioid Crisis Task Force makes the following 11 policy recommendations for optimizing federal funding for the opioid crisis:

MANDATORY SPENDING

- Ensure Parity and Expand Coverage for SUD Services
- Increase Medicaid and Medicare Reimbursements for OUD/SUD Treatment
- Ensure Qualified Health Providers Can Bill for OUD/SUD Treatment (In-person and via Telehealth as Appropriate)

DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

- Optimize the SOR and SABG Grant Programs
- “Braid,” or Coordinate, Federal Funding Streams Thematically

DATA REPORTING AND METRICS

- Establish a Set of Evidence-based “Core Metrics” Tied to Surveillance and Health Services Delivery
- Collect “Core Metrics” for OUD/SUD Surveillance and Health Service Delivery More Frequently and Undergo Relevant System Updates
- Create an OUD/SUD Data Dashboard to Improve Data Sharing and Policymaking While Maintaining Privacy

GOVERNANCE

- Reorient ONDCP’s Role to Focus More on Policy Leadership and Federal Coordination
- Provide Expert Technical Assistance to States
- Leverage ONDCP’s National Drug Control Strategy for Congressional Oversight

BPC OPIOID CRISIS TASK FORCE

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