

Is This the Next Step in Dealing With America's Dire Opioid Crisis?

The Trump administration is releasing its plan to fight America's opioid epidemic, which last week the president declared a "public health emergency." Although deaths from heroin, prescription pain killers and fentanyl dominate news headlines and political rhetoric, the problem continues to get worse—not better.

Opioid overdoses claimed the lives of more than 64,000 Americans last year, the most since records have been kept. Since 2000, half a million people have overdosed on opioids.

Since March, when President Trump formed the Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis and appointed New Jersey Governor Chris Christie as its leader, the panel has been studying the opioid crisis with the goal of formulating a comprehensive plan to end the outbreak of addiction and death. The panel recommends a number of ways to combat the opioid epidemic.

Greater Access to Treatment

Opioids are highly addictive. Yet only an estimated 10 percent of addicts receive professional treatment. Most drug-addiction specialists agree structured rehabilitation is necessary in order to stop using opioids permanently. Therefore, the commission recommends ways to provide easier access to opioid rehab facilities.

The commission also called for a nationwide system of drug courts that would send opioid addicts convicted of drug crimes to treatment instead of prison.

They also support the expansion of Medicaid-funded outpatient

drug clinics that offer drugs like methadone to safely control the addiction and ideally wean the user off opioids.

Overdose Antidote

The commission wants to provide all first responders with the drug naloxone, known as the overdose antidote, which stops a drug overdose in its tracks and saves lives.

Stop the Flow

Opioid addiction often starts with prescription painkillers then progresses to heroin or fentanyl when the pills are no longer available or affordable. Heroin and fentanyl are cheaper and easier to obtain. The commission wants the U.S. Postal Service and the Department of Homeland Security to beef-up package inspections, especially ones from China, where fentanyl is typically made. The commission will also recommend stronger penalties for fentanyl trafficking.

Focus on Doctors

The commission wants doctors who prescribe opioids to undergo training to make sure they understand the risks associated with these prescriptions. Proof of having received the training will be required for medical license renewal.

More doctors will be trained in addiction recovery to handle the large numbers of addicts needing help.

Greater effort will be placed on developing and implementing non-opioid pain relief treatments.

A prescription-drug data base will require doctors and pharmacists to check whether a patient to whom they're prescribing painkillers has already received similar prescriptions from other doctors.

Don't Even Start

Finally, the commission recommends a comprehensive public relations campaign to discourage Americans from ever taking opioids in the first place. The mass media push would raise

awareness about the danger of opioid use and would attempt to address the stigma surrounding addiction. {eoa}

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