

CLOSE TO HOME

How opioids are impacting families, jobs, communities, and the economy

Last month, President Trump declared opioid abuse and addiction to be a nationwide public health emergency, and called for Congress and the administration to act on the issue that impacts over 11 million Americans. The opioid epidemic has inflicted suffering and loss on thousands of victims and their families.

Next week, the Committee on Education and the Workforce will hold a [hearing](#) on how opioid abuse and addiction is impacting families, communities, and the economy:

Families

It is clear that the opioid public health emergency is a multigenerational problem affecting infants all the way to seniors, and it will have resounding repercussions for many years to come. One of the most shocking aspects of the emergency is just how wide its reach is.



- Last year, [61.8 million](#) patients received opioid prescriptions, or **19.1 percent** of the population. Of those patients prescribed opioids, **3.7 million** were children and teenagers.
- Almost [one-third](#) of patients taking at least a one month supply of prescription opioids were still using opioids a year later.
 - Something that makes these numbers so especially troubling is the fact that [three out of four heroin addicts](#) do not start with heroin, but instead begin with prescription opioids, obtained either legally or illegally.
- In 2015, [276,000 adolescents](#) (12-17 years old) were current nonmedical users of pain reliever, with **122,000 having an addiction** to prescription pain relievers.
- There is also a rise in rates of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), the diagnosis of a newborn that is physiologically dependent on drugs or alcohol and will go through withdrawals. NAS is generally caused by the opioids that their mothers are dependent on while pregnant. About [half of babies](#) who are exposed to opioids during pregnancy will experience NAS.
- The number of children in foster care nationwide as of September 2014 rose [3.5 percent](#) from a year earlier to **415,129**, according to the latest data collected by the Administration for Children and Families, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Between 2009 and 2014, the percent of children nationwide with parental alcohol or drug use as a factor in out-of-home placement rose from [29.4 percent to 35.1 percent](#).
- In that same time span, parental drug abuse showed the largest increase ([from 22.1 percent to 29.7 percent](#)) of any reason for a child to be removed from a home.
 - The Indiana Department of Child Services estimates [2,600 children](#) had to be removed from homes due to parental drug abuse in a six-month period that ended in March of 2015, a 71 percent jump from two years earlier.
- Other experts have even linked a [rise in suicides](#) among children and teenagers to opioid abuse in the home.

Community

Communities across America have been rocked by the rapid rise in opioid abuse. People in small towns and big cities have witnessed their neighbors and friends spiral downward into addiction, and have felt powerless to prevent it.

- For some American communities, opioid use is so prolific that illegal pills are actually a form of [community currency](#).
- In 2014, just [24 percent](#) of prescription abusers of pain relievers received their pills legitimately from a doctor. Most abusers instead received their drugs for free from a friend or relative (**45 percent**).

- Research from Alan Krueger showed that in the median U.S. county, physicians prescribed nearly a [two-week supply of oxycodone](#) for every resident.
- More public funding and resources must be allocated to meet abuse and treatment needs within a community.
 - Ohio has created [20 family dependency treatment courts](#) that offer an alternative judicial track for parents dealing with drug addiction.
- In 2015, for white non-Hispanic men and women aged 50 to 54 without a college degree—who are much more seriously at risk than those with a college degree—opioid deaths are around [110 per 100,000](#), of which 50 are accidental overdoses, 30 are suicides, and 30 are alcoholic liver disease and cirrhosis.
- For the first time since 1993, life expectancy in the United States declined, estimating that opioid overdose deaths accounted for [2.5 months of the 4 months' decline](#).



Economy

The national ramifications of the opioid public health emergency are far-reaching. As the opioid public health emergency continues to worsen, the economy will continue to suffer.

- Data from the CDC analyzing opioid overdose deaths by age groups in 1999 and 2015 showed that the people most likely to die of an opioid overdose are between the ages of [25 and 39 years old](#).
 - The untimely deaths of these men and women directly affect U.S. labor markets. These are people who are squarely in the nation's workforce and significant contributors to the American economy.
 - Of prime age men who are *not* in the labor force, almost half take pain medication every day. [Two-thirds](#) of these men take prescription pain medication daily.
- The costs associated with opioid abuse have an impact on [many different sectors](#) of the economy.
 - \$25 billion to the health care system
 - \$25.6 billion to the workplace, in the form of lost earnings and employment
 - \$5.1 billion to the criminal justice system



According to many analysts, [the worst of the opioid public health crisis is yet to come](#). A comprehensive strategy is needed to assist families, communities, and the American economy at large.

The Committee on Education and the Workforce is committed to being a part of the conversation in order to help bring this health emergency to an early end.

