

Improving Medicaid Programs' Response to Overdose Victims and Enhancing (IMPROVE) Addiction Care Act

Nearly 120,000 children enrolled in Medicaid across the Appalachian region received at least one opioid prescription in 2018.¹ In some states, the share of child beneficiaries receiving at least one prescription opioid outpaced that of adult beneficiaries.² This reckless prescribing puts Medicaid beneficiaries at risk of misuse and overdose. Furthermore, the issue has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – overdose deaths reached an all-time high between June 2019 and May 2020.³

Despite research demonstrating nonfatal overdoses are among the most significant predictors of a future overdose,⁴ the Medicaid program has persistently failed to help enrollees in these circumstances. A study of 3,606 Medicaid-enrolled adolescents (ages 13-22) who experienced an opioid-related overdose found that *only one in 54 received medication-assisted treatment, and less than one in three received any treatment whatsoever.*⁵

Equally concerning, *Medicaid beneficiaries often receive legal opioid prescriptions even after suffering a nonfatal, opioid-related overdose.* In Pennsylvania, approximately 60 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries who suffered a nonfatal overdose between 2007 and 2013 received another legal opioid analgesic prescription within six months.⁶ Boston University and Harvard Medical School also found that 91 percent of patients who suffered an opioid-related overdose between 2000 and 2012 received a legal opioid prescription within a year.⁷

In 2018, Congress included a provision (Section 2006) in the *SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act* (P.L. 115-271) that notifies Medicare prescribers of their patients' history of nonfatal, opioid-related overdoses. *Unfortunately, this issue was not addressed in Medicaid.* Recent research suggests that prescribers alter their opioid prescribing when informed of their patient's fatal, opioid-related overdose.⁸ These findings demonstrate the importance of communicating outcomes to providers to help influence positive behaviors.

The *IMPROVE* Addiction Care Act would require that state Medicaid programs use their existing drug utilization review (DUR) programs to:

- **Alert prescribers** to their patient's previous nonfatal and fatal overdose
- **Connect survivors to treatment** after identifying individuals who have suffered a nonfatal, opioid-related overdose; and
- **Perform ongoing reviews** of prescribing patterns and offer provider education

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, "Opioids in Medicaid: Concerns About Opioid Use Among Beneficiaries in Six Appalachian States," December 2020, <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/OEI-05-19-00410.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ "Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID-19," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 17, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>

⁴ Mark Stooze, Paul Dietze, Damine Jolley, "Overdose deaths following previous non-fatal heroin overdose: Record linkage of ambulance attendance and death registry data," *Drug and Alcohol Review*, July, 06, 2009, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1465-3362.2009.00057.x>

⁵ Rachel Alinsky, Bonnie Zima, Jonathan Rodean, et al., "Receipt of Addiction Treatment After Opioid Overdose Among Medicaid-Enrolled Adolescents and Young Adults," *JAMA Pediatrics*, January 6, 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2758103>

⁶ Winfred Frazier, Gerald Cochran, Wei-Hsuan Lo-Ciganic, et al., "Medication-Assisted Treatment and Opioid Use Before and After Overdose in Pennsylvania Medicaid," *JAMA*, August 22, 2019, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2649173>

⁷ Marc Larochelle, Jane Liebschutz, Fang Zhang, Dennis Ross-Degnan, Frank Wharam, "Opioid Prescribing After Nonfatal Overdose and Association With Repeated Overdose," *Annals of Internal Medicine*, January 5, 2016, <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M15-0038>

⁸ Jason Doctor, et al., "Opioid Prescribing Decreases After Learning of a Patient's Fatal Overdose," *Science Magazine*, August 10, 2018, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6402/588>