

90% who need substance-use disorder treatment don't get it

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What's the news: The AMA, the American Society of Addiction Medicine and others are taking part in National Addiction Treatment Week to promote the reality that substance-use disorder is a chronic medical disease for which there are evidence-based treatments to support recovery.

The AMA has detailed the road ahead in “Confronting the Opioids Epidemic in Our Communities,” an advertisement that is being published in news outlets across the country.

Why it matters for patients and physicians: More than 20 million people nationwide live with a substance-use disorder, yet federal officials say that only 10% of those affected receive treatment for the condition.

“The opioid crisis today is a national tragedy that requires the same resolve we have mustered for other public health epidemics. Those with substance-use disorders deserve no less,” said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, also chair of the AMA Opioid Task Force. “Most people agree we need access to treatments that include medication. Unfortunately, that’s not readily available for many patients, and this epidemic will not be reversed until we deal with access issues and stigma associated with opioid misuse.”

The AMA has released a national policy road map based on in-depth analysis of the response to the opioid epidemic by four states: Colorado, Mississippi, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. The report, “National Roadmap on State-Level Efforts to End the Opioid Epidemic: Leading-edge Practices and Next Steps,” analyzes successful strategies used and lessons learned to guide policymakers and others in the months ahead.

This report highlights six key areas where regulators, policymakers and other key stakeholders can take action: access to medication-assisted treatment, mental-health parity enforcement, insurance network adequacy and capacity, access to comprehensive pain care, and access to naloxone.

What's next: Physicians can make use of the CME and other educational resources available by state and medical specialty at the AMA's End the Epidemic website. Last year, more than 700,000 doctors and other health professionals took courses related to opioids.

"There are many reasons to be optimistic," Dr. Harris said. "However, much work remains to be done so that patients can access needed pain treatment, while addressing and alleviating substance-use disorders."