

Feb. 18, 2022: State Advocacy Update

New toolkit highlights effective policies in combating drug overdoses

With drug overdose deaths reaching record numbers, the AMA and Manatt Health released a toolkit (PDF) to guide states on removing barriers to evidence-based patient care.

Stakeholders in every state can use this new resource with legislators, regulators and other officials to pursue policies that are working to help patients. States have taken myriad approaches to expand treatment for patients with a substance use disorder, and the toolkit provides evidence and feedback on what is working where and why.

“We are at a pivotal moment. Overdoses are an epidemic within a COVID-19 pandemic. The health care system is under considerable strain. We have to focus on what is working, and states have become laboratories of public policy. With money coming in from opioid litigation settlements, there is an opportunity to expand the policy options to help our patients,” said Bobby Mukkamala, MD, chair of the AMA Board of Trustees and chair of the AMA Task Force on the Overdose Epidemic.

To ensure access to evidence-based treatment, the toolkit recommends states expand treatment of opioid use disorder in Medicaid and commercial insurance and remove barriers, such as prior authorization and other utilization management policies. Additionally, treatment must address disparities and the needs of all patients equitably, including vulnerable populations.

The toolkit also highlights the importance of enforcing laws on mental health and substance use disorder parity, telehealth, and access to the full continuum of pain care options. States have taken several approaches to making naloxone, the overdose-reversing drug, more affordable and available. The AMA and Manatt Health released a national policy roadmap (PDF) in December 2020 with detailed recommendations for policymakers to take action.

“Our extensive toolkit demonstrates that states are engaged and making progress on multiple fronts in battling the drug overdose epidemic,” said Joel Ario, a managing director at Manatt and former state insurance commissioner. “Yet the death count continues to rise, making it imperative that legislators and regulators in every state learn from each other and double down on the strategies—from

coverage mandates to naloxone distribution – that have proven effective in saving lives.”

Download the toolkit.

Editor’s note: The AMA convened more than 25 national, state, specialty and other health care associations in 2014 to form the AMA Substance Use and Pain Care Task Force to coordinate efforts within organized medicine to help end the nation’s opioid epidemic. Additional information on the task force is available. Real-time updates on the AMA’s work on opioids are accessible.

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