



Health Experts Skeptical over White House Opioid Crisis Progress

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The White House is touting progress in the fight against the opioid epidemic?but health experts are skeptical. Health policy researchers are warning the Trump administration against claiming credit, saying that planning cuts to Medicaid funding could worsen the situation.

Earlier, Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway said that progress has been made since the president unveiled his plan last year to combat the US opioid crisis which is killing thousands of Americans per year. The president?s plan included stricter punishments for drug dealers and a pledge to cut opioid prescriptions by a third by 2021.

Conway, who leads anti-drug efforts on Capitol Hill, pointed to the decline in prescriptions for opioid painkillers, as well as the slower growth rate for overdose deaths. She also referred to the government?s efforts to combat illicit use of drugs like Fentanyl.

The administration said that prescription for opioid painkillers has dropped 25 percent over the past year. 1.4 billion people have also seen ads teaching young people about the dangers of opioid use.

?In President Trump?s first year in office, overdose deaths grew by 10 percent, having grown by 22 percent the year before,? Conway said. ?So the rate of death increased at a rate less than half of what had increased just the year before.?

However, health experts are not in total agreement. They say there?s little evidence to show that recent progress is a result of the White House?s efforts. They noted that prescriptions have been declining since 2012?even before Trump became president. They also argued that a slower growth rate for overdose deaths cannot be clearly connected to these efforts.

They also said that the president?s proposed cuts to Medicaid would be harmful to patients seeking addiction treatment. Click the link to see Worcester's top rehab placement programs.

?There are some positive signs, but I don?t believe the Trump Administration deserves credit for them,? said Dr. Andrew Kolodny, co-director of opioid policy research at Brandeis University. ?In fact, there is a lot more the Trump administration and the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) could be doing to promote more cautious prescribing and properly regulating opioid makers.?

Health policy researchers pointed out that the administration?s National Drug Control Strategy report was not released until earlier this year. It also failed to include a budget projection or ?annual objectives that are quantifiable and measurable,? according to the findings from the Government Accountability Office.

House Oversight Committee Chairman Elijah Cummings, D-Md. also condemned the administration?s plan as a ?23-page pamphlet? that ?fails to meet even the most basic requirements in the law.?

Keith Humphreys, a Stanford professor, and former senior policy adviser at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, also criticized the administration?s report for having no ?central direction? and the fact that there is no proper spokesperson for the epidemic. ?No matter who is president, this is a problem,? he said.

Humphreys added that the president?s budget proposal, which includes cuts to Medicaid, would prove to be a ?disaster for the crisis,? especially for those who rely on Medicaid for addiction treatment.

Amie Goodin, a researcher at the University of Florida College of Pharmacy, said she was discouraged by the administration?s strategy because there are no clearly articulated budget priorities. The report encourages states to apply for Medicaid waivers to expand treatment, however, it does not specify how waivers could be funded in the face of proposed Medicaid cuts.

?The vagueness of the strategy on all fronts?from the absence of measurable objectives to the omission of specific administrative authority, oversight, and funding plans for these missing objectives?is frustrating to all who desire improvements,? said Goodin.

Right now the White House has not responded to these criticisms over their plan to address the opioid epidemic.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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