Elizabeth Warren Proposes $100 Billion Plan to End the Opioid Epidemic

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Sen. Elizabeth Warren recently rolled out a federal proposal that will tackle the US opioid epidemic. Experts and analysts say that it is the most ambitious federal proposal to deal with the current health crisis, as it will reportedly cost $100 billion.

The proposal is an updated version of the CARE Act that Warren and Rep. Elijah Cummings previously introduced in Congress. It would allocate $100 billion over 10 years to fight the opioid crisis, which is now being considered the nation?s deadliest drug overdose epidemic in US history.

The $100 billion proposal matches the level of spending that experts have long said is necessary to make a serious dent in the crisis. While advocates believe the proposal is ambitious, it is also most likely to reverse the epidemic.

Keith Humphreys, a drug policy expert at Stanford University, said that the bill is the only one that truly grasps the nettle of how big the problem is.

?Whatever else people might say about it, this is the first thing that really recognizes that [the opioid crisis] is a massive public health problem, like AIDS, and is not going to be solved by a tweak here, a tweak there,? said Humphreys.

Warren is known for her many policy proposals on the presidential campaign trail, as well as her work against banks and credit card companies. In the Senate, she has also built a formidable record on the opioid crisis.

She has previously called for more research into alternative painkillers in an attempt to replace opioids. This includes research on medical marijuana. She has also tried to hold President Donald Trump?s administration accountable for its lackluster response to the crisis.

Warren has also pushed for a government watchdog agency to investigate the administration.

?Our communities are on the front lines of the epidemic, and they?re working hard to fight back,? Warren said in an interview about the original CARE Act. ?But they can?t do it alone. They can?t keep nibbling around the edges.?

In 2017, there were around 70,000 recorded drug overdose deaths. About two-thirds of this was linked to opioids, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Because of this, the CDC linked it to a drop in US life expectancy that year.

Warren?s home state of Massachusetts saw a drug overdose death rate of 31.8 per 100,000 people in 2017. This is far above the national average of 21.7.

While Congress has changed some regulations to open up access to treatment, Warren?s proposal reflects the general agreement among experts and activists that the federal government needs to do more on the opioid crisis.

The CARE Act would authorize $100 billion to address drug addiction in the US over the course of 10 years. The goal is to boost addiction treatment and other policy initiatives that can reduce overdose deaths dramatically.

It will be funded through a previously proposed wealth tax on the super-rich. Warren explained: ?If you have more than $50 million, we?re going to ask you to pay a tax of 2 cents per dollar on every dollar after your fifty-millionth and first. It raises $2.75 trillion over the next ten years?enough to pay for my plans to cancel student loan debt and provide universal free college, fully fund universal childcare, and end the opioid epidemic. And guess what ? we?d still have nearly a trillion dollars left over.?

The money is divided into several pots: some would go to states, territories, and tribal governments. Others would go to local governments and non-profit programs. Some would be based on overdose levels, while others would go out through competitive grants.

A significant portion of the funding would power innovative treatment models. Some would be dedicated to expanding access to the opioid overdose antidote Naloxone.

The rest of the funds would go to research, surveillance, and training for health care staff.

?As the AIDS crisis got worse and worse back in the 1980s and into the ?90s, Congress kept offering little bits of treatment. And the crisis deepened,? Warren said previously. ?It wasn?t until a little boy named Ryan White declared that he had AIDS that Congress was moved to act. They put real money into research and treatment. And it brought down the new instances of HIV/AIDS, and developed a treatment that has kept people alive for years now.?

The opioid epidemic is by far the deadliest drug overdose crisis in US history. Since the crisis began in the late 1990s, more than 700,000 people have died from drug overdoses.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol 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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