



## **AMA Task Force Outlines Plan to Combat the Opioid Epidemic**

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The AMA Opioid Task Force recently released recommendations that outline their plan to combat and end the opioid epidemic. The recommendations call on policymakers to eliminate barriers to treatment for those who are suffering from opioid use disorder or substance use disorder. The task force also urges policymakers to take additional steps to end the nation's opioid misuse epidemic.

The task force was launched by the AMA in 2014 in order to learn about the best practices for combating opioid abuse. It was also tasked with identifying ways to swiftly implement those practices in medical offices and other healthcare facilities across the country. The AAFP is among the 27 health professional organizations that comprise the task force.

The new recommendations focus on barriers to treatment for those with OUD, SUD, and pain. Those who are misusing their pills aren't the only ones affected by the opioid crisis. Even those who genuinely need prescription medications to treat their pain are also struggling to secure their refills because of tighter regulations.

The task force targeted the other policies that limit patients' ability to receive care, including prior authorization, step therapy, and other administrative burdens. There is also the problem of inadequate enforcement of state and federal laws that require insurance parity for mental health and substance use disorders.

"We need help from policymakers to ensure that more people have access to treatment," said AMA President-elect and task force chair Patrice Harris, M.D., M.A., in a news release. "Physicians are responding to the epidemic, and we are seeing results: a reduction in opioid prescribing of 33 percent since 2013, increased use of prescription drug monitoring programs, enhanced education and greater co-prescribing of naloxone. But we cannot enforce parity laws or eliminate administrative barriers without the help of state and federal authorities, and that's what's limiting treatment now."

The AMA task force recommends removing prior authorization that delays or deny care that uses FDA-approved medications as part of medication-assisted treatment for OUD. Instead, policymakers need to support assessment, referral, and treatment for co-occurring mental health disorders and enforce state and federal laws that require insurance parity for mental health and substance use disorders.

Here are the AMA Opioid Task Force's new recommendations: Remove prior authorization, step therapy and other inappropriate administrative burdens or barriers that delay or deny care that uses FDA-approved medications in medication-assisted treatment protocols for OUD.

Support assessment, referral, and treatment for co-occurring mental health disorders, as well as enforce state and federal laws that require insurance parity for mental health and SUDs.

Remove administrative and other barriers to comprehensive, multimodal, multidisciplinary pain care and rehabilitation programs.

Support maternal and child health by increasing access to evidence-based treatment, preserving families and ensuring that policies are non-punitive. Click the link to see Las Vegas's top rehab placement programs.

Support reforms in the civil and criminal justice system that help ensure access to high-quality, evidence-based care for OUD, including MAT.

"The original task force recommendations called on physicians to accept the responsibility to take a leadership role in ending the epidemic," said Harris. "Yet, more people are dying each year, emphasizing the need for policymakers to protect patients' access to evidence-based care for pain and for opioid use disorder."

Robert Rich, M.D., of Bladenboro, N.C., who represents the AAFP on the AMA Opioid Task Force, said that the task force noted the increasing impact of governmental and insurer policies on the recommended changes in physician behaviors that the original set of recommendations called for.

The members of the task force cited many different instances wherein the policies and actions have hampered or limited the availability of treatment alternatives to opioids. In certain cases, policies prevented physicians from training in MAT.

?To increase the availability of alternative treatments to opioids for pain and to increase the availability of MAT, the task force felt that the impact of these burdensome and restrictive policies and actions must be addressed,? he said. ?While there are multiple reasons to account for this sharp rise in overdose and death, including the increased use of street drugs as prescription opioids are increasingly restricted, the task force advocates for the expansion of substance abuse treatment and adjunctive services as the common denominator to reverse this trend.?

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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