



National Panel Urges Doctors to Screen All Adult Patients for Drug Abuse

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A national panel of health experts recommended that doctors screen all adult patients for illicit drug use, including the improper use of prescription medications. The recommendation comes in the midst of the worst drug crisis in US history, wherein around 130 Americans die every day because of an opioid-related overdose.

The US Preventive Services Task Force said that doctors should ask everyone about both illegal and prescription drug use because about 1 in 10 Americans say that they misuse drugs.

The group, however, does not endorse screening for teenagers. This puts the group at odds with major adolescent health groups who recommend screening teenagers for drug abuse. The panel, appointed by the federal Department of Health and Human Services, said that its proposed guidelines are intended to combat the alarming rates of substance abuse in the United States.

The US Preventive Services Task Force cited a 2017 federal survey that found 1 in 10 Americans ages 18 and older said they were using illicit drugs or not using their medications in ways that doctors intended. This

new recommendation is an effort to slow the deadly use of opioids, including street Fentanyl and heroin, as well as prescription painkillers. The current opioid epidemic is now being considered the worst drug crisis in US history.

Addiction experts hope that if front-line health professionals can detect patients' burgeoning abuse of drugs early, they can help contain or reverse the problems. Although the guidelines are not binding on doctors, they do carry some weight. A provision in the Affordable Care Act says that services recommended by the task force must be covered by insurance with minimal or no co-payment.

It is worth noting that in 2008, this same panel said that it did not have sufficient evidence that screenings could help people stop abusing drugs. The new proposed guidelines mark a major shift for the panel, as the opioid epidemic has clearly worsened over the last decade.

Furthermore, recent research shows that screening can result in successful intervention, according to the panel. With this in mind, the panel recommends that doctors should ask patients about drug use either in written questionnaires or in private conversations during the office visit.

"We don't want doctors and nurses to get hung up on one tool or another," said Dr. Carol Mangione, an author of the proposals who is a professor of medicine and public health at the University of California Los Angeles. "Just that they do it."

The guidelines are not yet open for public comment. However, they do carry significant challenges for implementation. Many doctors have no training in how to elicit honest answers from patients about such stigmatized behavior.

The task force noted that screening cannot take place in a vacuum: doctors should be able to offer referrals for further diagnosis and treatment. [Click the link to see Ithaca's top rehab placement programs](#)

"It's on all of us providers to understand the diagnostic and treatment sources in our communities and not to use our lack of knowledge as a reason not to treat people," said Mangione. She added that careful screening could correct some problems for most patients.

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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