



HHS Research on Pain Treatment and Opioid Misuse and Overdose – Translating Science Into Action



Tracking the Opioid Epidemic

This research guides our actions to address the opioid epidemic including monitoring the impacts of the epidemic, characterizing risk and protective factors, and recognizing emerging trends.

New Research Activities: Studying the causal pathways of opioid misuse and abuse, how pain is being treated, and the economic impact of pain treatment.



Percentage of drug overdose deaths that involved a prescription or illicit opioid in 2014.



Research to Understand Pain and Opioid Addiction

Research is fundamental to prevention efforts and to the development of new and more effective treatments. This includes characterizing the molecular pathways of pain, understanding the genetics of opioid addiction, and identifying biomarkers and other measures to determine which treatments will be most effective for individual patients.

New Research Activities: Identifying people with pain who are most likely to benefit from opioid pain medication as well as those at risk of experiencing opioid-related harms.



NIH is supporting more than 30 studies designed to prevent chronic pain.



Research on New Treatments

There is a pressing need to develop new treatments for pain and opioid overdose and addiction. This includes studying the next generation of innovative pain treatments, supporting the development of abuse-deterrent opioids, and funding the development of opioid addiction vaccines.

New Research Activities: Investigating different naloxone formulations to reverse overdoses from fentanyl and other high potency opioids, assessing the costs and effectiveness of different pain care treatments, and reviewing evidence for non-opioid pain treatments.



The number of FDA approved opioid analgesics with abuse-deterrent properties.



Research to Improve Clinical Practice

Identifying clinical practices that improve pain treatment, reduce misuse and overdose, and then implementing them broadly is fundamental to stopping the opioid epidemic. This includes developing education and training for healthcare providers, studying how best to use non-opioid pain treatments, and identifying the most effective ways to provide opioid addiction treatment.

New Research Activities: Examining opioid prescribing practices to reduce the amount of unneeded medication, and developing and validating clinical tools to assess patient risk.



Number of Centers of Excellence in Pain Education funded by NIH for the development, evaluation, and distribution of pain management curriculum resources for health professional schools.



Policy Evaluation

Implementing effective policies is a central component of the opioid epidemic response. This includes evaluating pain clinic and prescription drug monitoring program policies, the impact of insurance coverage policies on pain and addiction treatment, and analyzing federal, state, and local policies related to expanding access to naloxone to reverse opioid overdose.

New Research Activities: Studying coverage policies for and access to MAT and related behavioral health services, and evaluating the impact of state Good Samaritan laws.



CDC found that Florida's opioid overdose death rate decreased 27% between 2010 and 2012 after the state implemented policies such as a pill mill law and prescription drug monitoring program.