

Senator John Cornyn Testimony on America's Drug Addiction Crisis

- Chairman Gowdy and Ranking Member Cummings, I thank you for holding this hearing to discuss an issue of great national importance – addressing America's drug addiction crisis.

- From 1999 to 2016, more than 350,000 Americans have died from an overdose involving opioids--more people than the current population of the City of St. Louis.

- This epidemic is hitting every community and every state, with over 2,800 deaths in my home State of Texas in 2016.

- But it didn't happen overnight. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has outlined the rise in opioid overdose deaths in three distinct waves.

- The first began in 1999, with increasing overdose deaths attributed to prescription opioids.

- Then in 2010, we saw a rapid increase in overdose deaths involving heroin, which is cheaper than diverted prescription opioids.

- The third wave began in 2013, with significant increases in overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, like illicitly manufactured fentanyl.
- Of the over 64,000 overdose deaths in 2016, more than half were the result of heroin and synthetic opioids—not prescription drugs.
- What is clear is that addressing only prescription opioids will not remedy the crisis. We must also halt the flow of illicit drugs like heroin and fentanyl, including through increased detection and intervention efforts, at America's borders and ports of entry.
- Transnational criminal organizations and drug cartels will stop at nothing to exploit Americans who are addicted to the narcotics that are tearing apart families and communities.
- And sadly, demand for the illicit drugs being sold by these criminal organizations has only increased as we have stepped up efforts to limit prescription opioid diversion.
- Now more than ever, we need to carry out a comprehensive and coordinated strategy across all levels of government to address both the supply and demand for illegal narcotics in the United States.

- That is why I am proud to have worked with Senator Dianne Feinstein to introduce the Substance Abuse Prevention Act of 2018 in the Senate.
- Our bill strengthens and reauthorizes the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), which oversees all Executive Branch efforts on narcotics control, implements a national drug control strategy, and strengthens and compliments state and local anti-drug activities.
- This includes the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program, which provides resources for federal, state, and local law enforcement task forces operating in our most critical drug-trafficking regions. The bill also improves the program by targeting funds for the implementation of a coordinated drug overdose response strategy.
- The bill reauthorizes the Drug-Free Communities Program, one of our most important programs for preventing youth substance abuse and reducing demand for illicit narcotics at the community level.
- The Drug-Free Communities program has been a central, bipartisan component of our nation's demand reduction strategy since its passage in 1998 because it recognizes that the drug issue must be dealt with in every hometown in America.

- Solving our drug addiction crisis requires more than just law enforcement solutions—families and communities must work together to implement evidence-based approaches that prevent drug addiction. This is exactly the mission being carried out by Drug Free Communities coalition partners, and their efforts are critical to solving the drug abuse crisis.
- And while we hope to prevent substance abuse from becoming a criminal justice matter, there is no avoiding the fact that our courts will always have a role to play in addressing drug addiction challenges.
- That’s why my legislation would also reauthorize the Department of Justice’s Drug Court Program, which helps provide judicial and law enforcement officials on the front lines with tools and resources to help criminal defendants seek treatment and rehabilitation—instead of repeating the tragic cycle of addiction and incarceration.
- Finally, the Substance Abuse Prevention Act also builds upon the achievements of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (CARA) to help families with substance abuse challenges by providing resources for Sobriety, Treatment, and Recovery Teams that pair social workers and peer mentors with these families.

- Our bill is supported by a broad coalition of 102 organizations including the Community-Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, the Addiction Policy Forum, the National Association for Children of Addiction, the National Council for Behavioral Health, and the Fraternal Order of Police.
- Mr. Chairman I know that you will soon introduce legislation that would also reauthorize and strengthen ONDCP to address many of the issues I have highlighted today. I look forward to working with you as both of our bills move forward to ensure that the federal government is doing everything it can to respond to the grave challenge facing our nation.
- I hope that this Committee and members on both sides of the aisle will continue their efforts to find consensus solutions to our substance abuse crisis. Saving our children, families, and communities from drug addiction is a humanitarian issue, not a partisan issue.
- Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to testify today, and for your partnership on these efforts.