

Opening Statement of Chairman Fred Upton
Health Subcommittee Markup
April 20, 2016

Nearly every 12 minutes, someone dies of a drug overdose in the United States – That means someone has passed away since the gavel dropped. It’s a frightening prospect, but we have to face this epidemic head on, and today is an important step forward.

Addiction to opioids often progresses to heroin abuse. The disturbing trend of growing addiction, emergency room visits, and death are tearing apart families and communities in Michigan and across the country.

Opiate-related overdoses have become the number one cause of injury related to death in Michigan, as well as nationwide. And it’s hit particularly hard in Kalamazoo County. In recent years, we lost Amy Bousfield, an 18 year-old graduate of Portage Central High School, and Marissa King, a 21 year-old who began using heroin, despite having lost two friends to the drug – including Amy. This epidemic does not discriminate. We must band together to take what we have learned to begin making changes.

The numbers are staggering. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nationally, nearly 260 million opioid prescriptions were written in 2012 – that’s one for every single U.S. adult with 20 million to spare. And according to the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Americans consume 80 percent of the world’s prescriptions of opioids. We represent only 4.6% of the population. What is it that makes American pain so different?

Over the past year, we held hearings in both the Health and Oversight and Investigations subcommittees with more than two dozen witnesses and met with experts, stakeholders, individuals in recovery, and family members of opioid abuse victims.

Opioid addiction is a chronic disease of the brain and can be treated. Unfortunately, only 10 percent of the 23 million people suffering from alcohol and drug addiction get any form of treatment. Of the 10 percent who receive treatment, less than 20 percent receive evidence-based treatment.

In the past, too often federal policy toward opioid addiction has underemphasized the public health. It has become clear that we cannot simply arrest our way out of this epidemic. We are here today to try to do something about it, marking up several bipartisan bills that touch on the spectrum of issues driving the opioid crisis and general drug abuse.

Two of the bills help expand access to naloxone, a lifesaving overdose reversal drug. We also have a bill that will expand access for pregnant and post-partum opioid addicted women and their children. Another will make it easier for our vets returning from a tour of duty to translate the skills they have honed on the battle field to working and volunteering on our EMT squads around the country.

Members on and off this committee have brought forward a number of good bipartisan ideas that we will advance today at the health subcommittee. While there is no one solution to this growing epidemic, the bills before us today represent good steps in addressing a problem that is affecting every single community and countless families across the country. The subcommittee will do its important work today, and the full committee will quickly follow suit.