

Energy & Commerce
Health Subcommittee Legislative Hearing
June 21, 2023

OPENING STATEMENT
As Prepared for Delivery

INTRO

Today we continue our work to address the opioid crisis.

This Congress, this Committee has taken decisive actions to keep Americans safe from the threats of illegal drugs:

- We held two roundtables on the role that illicit fentanyl has played in driving up overdoses and poisonings
- We had Biden Administration officials testify on the crisis at the first health subcommittee hearing of this Congress
- We held a field hearing in Pennsylvania, where we heard from local law enforcement and providers who are on the frontlines of responding to this crisis
- And led on the HALT Fentanyl Act, which passed the House with a strong bipartisan vote.

And now it's time that we turn to strengthening the SUPPORT Act... Landmark legislation signed into law to bolster treatment and recovery initiatives, improve prevention, and fight fentanyl.

A GROWING CRISIS

When this Committee led the way on the SUPPORT Act five years ago, there were about 70,000 overdose deaths per year, driven by prescription opioids and other narcotics, like heroin.

Since then, even though Congress has appropriated more than \$20 billion to states for the Substance Use Block Grant and the State Opioid Response Block Grant, the crisis has changed for the worse.

The government-enforced COVID-19 lockdowns set millions of Americans--who were on the road to recovery--backwards.

Additionally, the pandemic sent more people into despair, driving them to take up illicit drugs for the first time.

We also saw a dramatic shift in the cause of overdoses, from prescription opioids to fentanyl poisonings and now other substances, like tranq.

Together, this caused overdose deaths to spike to more than 100,000 deaths per year... More people than ever.

In my home state, overdose deaths have increased by 108 percent since 2019. That is the second largest increase in the country.

To save lives and give people hope, we must address the root causes of this crisis:

- We need to cut off the supply of illegal drugs and hold traffickers accountable
- We need to better warn Americans and young people that any drug could be laced with fentanyl
- We need to increase treatment options for people in need
- And we need to help those in recovery stay on track and fully participate in their communities.

BILLS TODAY

Many of our bills will build on what has worked to improve access to care.

This includes the Protecting Moms and Infants Reauthorization Act, led by Representative Kim, to continue support for residential substance use disorder treatment services for pregnant and postpartum women.

The Safer Response Act, led by Representative D'Esposito, would continue support for training related to fentanyl and other illicit substances for first responders.

The RECONNECTS Act, led by Representative Griffith, would continue support for the improvement of prescription drug monitoring programs and other innovative projects related to rapid response of controlled substance misuse and overdoses.

I also believe it is important to permanently lift Medicaid's IMD Exclusion, so we do not arbitrarily limit access to care for those that need it most.

Advocates from every level of state and local government, as well as key associations that represent people with substance use disorder and mental health needs support lifting the IMD Exclusion as well.

These supporters recognize that when a patient needs help and is ready to seek treatment, we should not be denying them support at a level of care that works best for them.

It is time to end this prohibition once and for all.

CONCERNS

Before I close, I'd like to note my concerns on the Reentry Act and the Due Process Continuity of Care Act.

I support the goal of ensuring that people who are incarcerated have the tools to safely re-enter their communities and get the care that they need.

This is why I supported policies from Congressman Hudson last year that helped children who are incarcerated receive necessary treatments.

However, I have reservations about the bills in their current forms and believe that we need to know first what barriers exist for states, localities, and the Bureau of Prisons from providing care, which they're all currently required to do, instead of further expanding Medicaid and shifting costs to the federal government.

CLOSING

Overall, I want to thank you to all my colleagues who are leading on solutions today.

This crisis has hit every community.

We all know people and families who need to be rescued from despair.

For them, we must keep working together to ensure these solutions provide the support and tools people need to find meaning, purpose, and the chance for a better life.

That is how we can help restore hope and healing across America and build a brighter future for all.

Thank you.