

Press Release

October 21, 2019 FOR IMMEDIATE REALEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris: 516- 676-2008
safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Opioid Epidemic: Shift from Prescription Painkillers to Street Drugs

A recent article in Politifact states that in 2017, opioid overdoses killed more than 70,000 individuals who were primarily white Americans, but not one community or income group has been spared. Recently, lawsuits against prescription drug makers and distributors, such as Purdue Pharma and Cardinal Health, have produced multi-billion dollar settlements. The legal action aims to hold industry players accountable for the marketing and massive shipments of prescription painkillers that started in the mid-1990s and powered a wave of opioid addiction across the country.

Research analysts are now referencing a “third wave”, maintaining the United States has moved from a health crisis driven by prescription drugs, to one driven by heroin, and now, by synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, often smuggled from China. When it comes to public health threats, the third wave with mounting deaths from fentanyl and its ilk is the opioid epidemic’s new form. But that doesn’t mean the original problem with prescription drugs has gone away. Illicit fentanyl is really affecting the eastern part of the United States. In the western states, the problem is still prescription opioids. In less than a year, fentanyl and other potent synthetic opioids had eclipsed the death toll by the other two drugs. Deaths from heroin and painkillers leveled off at about 15,000 deaths a year. By 2017, the synthetic opioids were killing over 28,000.

Governments at every level have tried, with some success, to contain and reverse the opioid crisis. The federal government gave states money to build prescription drug monitoring programs. Agents began to crack down on doctors and pharmacies, also referred to as “pill mills.” Congress reclassified the active ingredient in prescription painkillers — hydrocodone — to put it under tighter control. In 2018, Medicare cut back on how much it would cover prescription painkillers, and the Drug Enforcement Administration lowered the cap on the amount of these drugs that manufacturers could produce. The drop in the number of prescriptions speaks to the effectiveness of those efforts. Because the problem is so widespread, efforts to provide immediate treatment to those in need remain a challenge. While Washington has sent states nearly \$2 billion since 2017, primarily to make treatment more available, a large gap remains. The 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found over 2 million people who abused opioids. The number who had received treatment was 516,000, about a fourth of those in need.

One hurdle is many people in less populated areas live far from a place to get treatment. In hard hit states such as Kentucky, rural residents might need to drive 25 miles to get to a clinic, and the same is true in New Hampshire and West Virginia. Total federal spending on opioids has risen dramatically, from \$3.3 billion in 2017 to \$7.4 billion in 2018. In that time, the emphasis has been on treatment and prevention. The money rose from 18% of all federal spending on opioids to 28%.

Medicaid has emerged as a key factor, for both hospitals and treatment clinics.

Even as the number of people in hospitals for opioid-related problems grew, the percentage of uninsured visits was cut in half. Medicaid helps pay for the medicines used to treat opioid abusers, spending \$1.2 billion in 2018.

Medicare has also been important. By 2014, Medicare covered the largest number of hospital visits for opioid abuse (over 15,000 and Medicaid wasn't far behind with about 13,000. Private insurance covered about 9,000.

While the legal battles and treatment options continue to be at the forefront of the epidemic, the opioid crisis continues.

PolitiFact.com is a nonprofit project operated by the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida with reporters and editors and its affiliated news media partners reporting on the accuracy of statements made by elected officials, candidates, their staffs, lobbyists, interest groups and others involved in U.S. politics. To read the full article please visit <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2019/oct/14/opioid-epidemic-shifts-prescription-painkillers-st/>.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org