

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: More Than Half of Americans in Need of Treatment

According to a recent article in the New York Times, roughly 3 in 10 adults have been addicted to opioids or have a family member who has been, and less than half of those with a substance use disorder (SUD) have received treatment. A survey conducted by KFF, an independent source for health policy research, polling, and news polled more than 1,300 adults in July, underscores the broad and often harmful influence of opioid addiction across the nation, which recorded around 110,000 fatal drug overdoses alone. The findings suggest that some proven medications for helping curb drug cravings, such as buprenorphine and methadone, are still not getting to those who need them. Only 25 percent of participants in the poll who said they or someone in their family had an opioid addiction reported receiving medication for themselves or family members.

The executive director of KFF's polling program, said that the numbers might be an undercount, as some survey participants might have been hesitant to share histories of opioid addiction. It was also possible that some people had their own ideas about what qualified as an addiction.

Opioid addiction affects every part of American society. Addiction cuts across class, race and geography, the KFF researchers found. Rural and white Americans were the likeliest to report personal or family opioid addiction, but significant percentages of Black, Hispanic, urban and suburban families did, as well.

White families were more likely than Black or Hispanic families to say that they had received treatment. Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported fatality rates among Black Americans climbed substantially as overdose death rates (number of drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people) increased 44 percent.

KFF reported low household income levels also appear to influence addiction. A higher percentage of households making less than \$40,000 annually reported possible prescription painkiller, illegal drug and alcohol addiction, compared with households with higher incomes.

Addiction has also weighed on the psyche of families as a third of Americans reported that they fear someone in their family will die of an opioid overdose. Roughly four in 10 adults said that they were concerned a family member would unintentionally ingest fentanyl, a potent and deadly synthetic opioid that is often mixed into other drugs or counterfeit pills and that can go undetected.

According to KFF, recent efforts to make treatment more accessible have had limited success despite the fact that on March 29, 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first nonprescription, "over-the-counter" (OTC) naloxone nasal spray, Narcan. This decision was a big step

forward in advancing the Health and Human Services (HHS) Overdose Prevention Strategy that expands the scope of the crisis response and promotes groundbreaking research and evidence-informed methods to improve the health and safety of communities.

In December, Congress dispensed with a special licensing requirement for health providers who want to prescribe buprenorphine, a medication that dulls cravings and prevents withdrawal, expanding the number of places drug users can seek treatment. But this year researchers found that less restrictive training requirements for health workers had not led to greater prescribing of the medication. Federal researchers found that in 2021, only about 20 percent of the roughly 2.5 million people with opioid use disorder had received medication treatment, a problem that especially affects Black adults, women and the unemployed.

The reasons may be cultural and financial. KFF researchers published some anonymous responses from survey participants who were asked why they or a family member did not get treated. “We are not raised that way,” a 22-year-old Black woman in Georgia said. “Lack of funding, no insurance coverage — turned away for treatment,” a 50-year-old white woman in South Carolina said.

More than 80 percent of the respondents said that naloxone, a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose, should be readily available in places like bars and fire stations.

Results of the survey showed the need for a stronger federal response to substance use disorders, akin to the one for AIDS. Primary care practices are especially critical to treating Americans. Methadone, another opioid addiction medication that alleviates cravings, is heavily regulated and often difficult for drug users to access and use continuously, prompting repeated calls from addiction physicians and public health experts for easing restrictions. President Biden this month requested \$350 million from Congress to fund addiction treatment and other drug-related services across the country. The Biden administration and federal lawmakers also continue to search for ways to loosen restrictions on treatment and pursuing rulemaking to make permanent the COVID-19 era flexibilities that allowed for telehealth prescribing of buprenorphine and take-home methadone doses.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. “Keeping Glen Cove SAFE,” 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.