

## **Improving Medicaid Programs' Response to Overdose Victims and Enhancing (IMPROVE) Addiction Care Act**

Nearly 120,000 children enrolled in Medicaid across the Appalachian region received at least one opioid prescription in 2018.<sup>1</sup> In some states, the share of child beneficiaries receiving at least one prescription opioid outpaced that of adult beneficiaries.<sup>2</sup> This reckless prescribing puts Medicaid beneficiaries at risk of misuse and overdose. Furthermore, the issue has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with overdose deaths reaching an all-time in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

Despite research demonstrating nonfatal overdoses are among the most significant predictors of a future overdose,<sup>4</sup> the Medicaid program has persistently failed to help enrollees in these circumstances. A study of 3,606 Medicaid-enrolled adolescents (ages 13-22) who experienced an opioid-related overdose found that *only one in 54 received medication-assisted treatment, and less than one in three received any treatment whatsoever.*<sup>5</sup>

Equally concerning, *Medicaid beneficiaries often receive legal opioid prescriptions even after suffering a nonfatal, opioid-related overdose.* In Pennsylvania, approximately 60 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries who suffered a nonfatal overdose between 2007 and 2013 received another legal opioid analgesic prescription within six months.<sup>6</sup> Boston University and Harvard Medical School also found that 91 percent of patients who suffered an opioid-related overdose between 2000 and 2012 received a legal opioid prescription within a year.<sup>7</sup>

In 2018, Congress included a provision (Section 2006) in the *SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act* (P.L. 115-271) that notifies Medicare prescribers of their patients' history of nonfatal, opioid-related overdoses. *Unfortunately, this issue was not addressed in Medicaid.* Recent research suggests that prescribers alter their opioid prescribing when informed of their patient's fatal, opioid-related overdose.<sup>8</sup> These findings demonstrate the importance of communicating outcomes to providers to help influence positive behaviors.

**The *IMPROVE Addiction Care Act* would require that state Medicaid programs use their existing drug utilization review (DUR) programs to:**

- ***Alert prescribers*** to their patient's previous nonfatal and fatal overdose,
- ***Connect survivors to treatment*** after identifying individuals who have suffered a nonfatal, opioid-related overdose, and
- ***Perform ongoing reviews*** of prescribing patterns and offer provider education.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, "Opioids in Medicaid: Concerns About Opioid Use Among Beneficiaries in Six Appalachian States," December 2020, <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/OEI-05-19-00410.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID-19," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 17, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>

<sup>4</sup> Mark Stooze, Paul Dietze, Damine Jolley, "Overdose deaths following previous non-fatal heroin overdose: Record linkage of ambulance attendance and death registry data," *Drug and Alcohol Review*, July, 06, 2009, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1465-3362.2009.00057.x>

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Alinsky, Bonnie Zima, Jonathan Rodean, et al., "Receipt of Addiction Treatment After Opioid Overdose Among Medicaid-Enrolled Adolescents and Young Adults," *JAMA Pediatrics*, January 6, 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2758103>

<sup>6</sup> Winfred Frazier, Gerald Cochran, Wei-Hsuan Lo-Ciganic, et al., "Medication-Assisted Treatment and Opioid Use Before and After Overdose in Pennsylvania Medicaid," *JAMA*, August 22, 2019, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2649173>

<sup>7</sup> Marc Larochelle, Jane Liebschutz, Fang Zhang, Dennis Ross-Degnan, Frank Wharam, "Opioid Prescribing After Nonfatal Overdose and Association With Repeated Overdose," *Annals of Internal Medicine*, January 5, 2016, <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M15-0038>

<sup>8</sup> Jason Doctor, et al., "Opioid Prescribing Decreases After Learning of a Patient's Fatal Overdose," *Science Magazine*, August 10, 2018, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6402/588>