Access to Medications Talking Points

Drug overdoses are the current leading cause of accidental death in the U.S., having surpassed traffic fatalities. Opioid addiction is driving this epidemic.

- There were 55,403 lethal drug overdoses in 2015, with 20,101 overdose deaths related to prescription opioid analgesics, and 12,990 overdose deaths related to heroin.¹
- Since 1999, sales of prescription pain medications have increased by 300 percent. In 2012, 259 million prescriptions were written for these drugs, which is more than enough to give every American adult their own bottle of pills.²
- The increase in availability of prescription opioids has been accompanied by an increase in opioid misuse and addiction.³
- Four in five new heroin users started out by misusing prescription drugs.⁴ As a consequence, the number of heroin-related deaths in the U.S. nearly quadrupled in the past decade.⁵

Studies have shown that opioid addiction medications are clinically effective in reducing drug use and promoting recovery.

- **Methadone maintenance** treatment, when used as part of a comprehensive treatment approach, continues to accrue evidence for its effectiveness in engaging and retaining patients in treatment, reducing withdrawal and craving symptoms, reducing opioid misuse, and reducing many opioid addiction-related health and social problems, particularly risk of infectious diseases.⁶
- Compared to outpatient, abstinence-based drug addiction treatment, office-based outpatient treatment (OBOT) with **buprenorphine** improves six-month treatment engagement, significantly reduces cravings, illicit opioid use and mortality and improves psychosocial outcomes.⁶
- **Extended-release injectable naltrexone** can essentially eliminate the rewarding effects of self-administered opioids, thereby dramatically reducing opioid use and opioid-related health and social problems.⁶
- Those receiving medications as part of their treatment are **75 percent less likely** to die because of addiction than those not receiving medications.⁷

Using medications for opioid addiction treatment results in decreased health care costs and criminal justice expenditures.

- Treatment is less expensive than alternatives. The average cost for 1 full year of methadone maintenance treatment is approximately $4,700 per patient, whereas 1 full year of imprisonment costs approximately $18,400 per person.⁸
- Every $1 invested in addiction treatment yields a return of **between $4 and $7** in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs and theft alone. When savings related to health care are included, total savings can exceed costs by a **ratio of 12:1**.⁹
- Methadone and buprenorphine treatment episodes have been associated with $223 to $153 lower total health care expenditures per month than other non-medication
behavioral health treatment episodes, most likely because patients are less than one half as likely to relapse when treated with methadone or buprenorphine than if they receive treatment without medication.\(^\text{10}\)

The costs of a monthly dose for oral naltrexone is approximately $60. In comparison, typical costs for self-administered insulin for diabetes are approximately $180 to $240. Extended release naltrexone is more expensive at approximately $700 a monthly dose, but a year of treatment using extended release naltrexone is $10,000 less than a year of imprisonment.\(^\text{6,8}\)

While these medications’ effectiveness has been proven, there are significant barriers to access.

- Significant access barriers to methadone include waiting lists for treatment entry, limited geographic coverage, limited insurance coverage and the requirement that many patients receive methadone at Opioid Treatment Programs daily.\(^\text{11}\)
- There is a clear disparity regarding availability of buprenorphine by patients in lower socioeconomic brackets and in urban areas, and an overall lack of Medicaid providers prescribing buprenorphine.\(^\text{12}\)
- Many treatment and housing programs in New Jersey do not allow patients on methadone or buprenorphine to participate, which severely limits care options.
- Medications for the treatment of opioid addiction are often subject to additional, onerous utilization management practices by public and private payers, including prior authorization requirements, “fail first” policies and requirements for psychosocial services that may either be unavailable or not covered by a patient’s plan.\(^\text{13}\)

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Appendix: Buprenorphine Diversion

In 2014, buprenorphine was estimated to be the fourth most common controlled substance and third most common narcotic analgesic among those secured in law enforcement operations and analyzed by Federal, State or local forensic laboratories. ¹

- The number of buprenorphine drug reports in 2014 represented about a third of oxycodone drug reports and less than half of hydrocodone drug reports.
- Buprenorphine drug reports represented only 1.01% of all drug reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (Of All Identified Drugs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxycodone</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alprazolam</td>
<td>40,747</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocodone</td>
<td>33,132</td>
<td>2.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buprenorphine</td>
<td>15,209</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clonazepam</td>
<td>11,797</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Buprenorphine is often diverted for therapeutic uses by opioid-dependent persons. ² Buprenorphine/naloxone diversion has been limited and illicit buprenorphine/naloxone—which is frequently acquired from individuals with prescriptions—is commonly used in a therapeutic, non-medically supervised manner.

Inability to access to treatment is a predictor of increased use of diverted buprenorphine.

- The finding that the most robust risk factor for buprenorphine use was failing to access legitimate buprenorphine treatment implies that increasing, not limiting, buprenorphine treatment access may be an effective response to buprenorphine diversion among persons not in treatment.³

