

Department of Justice

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Department of Justice Releases Strategy Memo to Address Prescription Opioid and Heroin Epidemic

Attorney General Lynch Announces Support, Calls on Governors to Strengthen PDMP Efforts

As part of the Obama Administration's commitment to address the rising public health challenges caused by the national prescription opioids and heroin epidemic, Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch issued a memo this week announcing the department's three-part **prevention, enforcement** and **treatment** strategy. The memo lays out action items, institutionalizes best practices, and builds on existing efforts by U.S. Attorney's Offices, the Drug Enforcement Administration and other Department of Justice components.

Additionally, Attorney General Lynch sent a letter to Governors calling on them to strengthen the effectiveness of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) and to improve data sharing of vital information from doctors and pharmacists about patient prescriptions—both within states and among neighboring states. To further this effort, the department also announced an \$8.8 million grant to 20 states to help reduce prescription drug abuse, misuse and diversion. The awards, funded under the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)'s Harold Rogers Prescription Drug Monitoring Program FY 2016 Competitive Grant Program, enable awardees to create, implement and enhance PDMPs.

A fact sheet of the strategy memo is outlined below.

FACT SHEET ON THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE STRATEGY MEMO TO ADDRESS PRESCRIPTION OPIOID ABUSE AND HEROIN EPIDEMIC THROUGH PREVENTION, ENFORCEMENT, AND TREATMENT

The heroin and prescription opioid epidemic is one of the most urgent law enforcement and public health challenges facing our country. The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced that 3.8 million people ages 12 and older are currently misusing prescription pain relievers in our country. In 2014, more than sixty percent of the 47,000 drug overdose deaths in America involved opioids, reflecting a dramatic increase over the past two decades.

The Department of Justice memo to federal prosecutors identifies some of the key action items that the department is taking now or will take in the near future to combat the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic as part of the Obama Administration's overall strategy to address the opioid epidemic. While the epidemic is a national problem, the department has and will continue to tailor efforts to the needs of each region, implemented by those who know their communities best.

PREVENTION

Action Items: Strengthen Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs)

- The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) will prioritize requests for Harold Rogers PDMP Grant Program

funding that involve the development and implementation of information exchanges between state PDMPs (or between PDMPs and other data sharing partners).

- BJA will develop and promote the use of “report cards” and other reports to alert prescribers about potentially inappropriate prescribing practices and encourage use of the PDMP.
- The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) will study the need for the creation of new grant programs or the modification of existing programs to promote formulation of timely, cleaned, de-identified PDMP information and other public data sets that are fully accessible by public health and law enforcement officials.

Action Items: Ensure Safe Drug Disposal

- The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) will expand efforts to develop community coalitions to help prevent the diversion of unused prescription opioids from homes.
- The DEA will work with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement and public health officials to develop “mobile” pick-up programs, which will be designed to make take-back options available to rural and underserved communities through coordinated regional efforts.
- The DEA will expand efforts to engage retail pharmacies seeking to establish permanent collection receptacles.

Action Items: Prevent Overdose Deaths with Naloxone

- BJA will promote the use of its “Law Enforcement Naloxone Toolkit” by all state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies throughout the country that do not already have a naloxone program.
- OJP will develop plans for continuing to expand access to naloxone and for enhancing information sharing regarding the effectiveness of naloxone programs.

ENFORCEMENT

Action Items: Investigate and Prosecute High-Impact Cases

- Directing the department’s resources towards the greatest threats, including but not limited to individuals and institutions responsible for the trafficking of heroin and fentanyl, those who improperly prescribe or divert opioids and those who use violence to further drug-trafficking activities.

Action Items: Enhance Regulatory Enforcement

- The DEA will develop metrics for measuring the effectiveness of its expanded regulatory efforts and use these metrics to refine its regulatory efforts.
- The DEA will expand engagement with the registrant community, especially manufacturers, doctors and pharmacists who handle opioid analgesics.

Action Items: Encourage Information Sharing

- The DEA and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) will partner with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement and public health partners to better facilitate information sharing through the use of investigative de-confliction tools, including the DEA Analysis and Response Tracking System (DARTS) and the De-confliction and Information Coordination Effort (DICE), as well as other information coordination systems, in coordination with DEA’s Special Operations Division, the OCDETF Fusion Center and the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), with the goal of sharing de-identified, real-time data between public health and public safety, when feasible, to reach maximum harm reduction in communities.
- The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office will require its grant recipients to share with the OCDETF Fusion Center relevant law enforcement information collected as a result of such funding.

- The DEA will expand its Drug/Heroin Data Capture project, a three-part data collection and sharing initiative, based at EPIC.
- The DEA will convene pathologist, toxicologists, medical examiners and state officials to better understand the challenges faced by overburdened state systems as those resource capabilities inform investigative and prosecutorial resource decisions and to assist those systems when possible.

Fund Enforcement-Related Research

- The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) will expand its study of the forensic analysis of evidence from medico-legal death investigations and law enforcement seizures, to develop profiles for fentanyl and other controlled substances to inform trend analysis and provide tactical intelligence.
- NIJ will conduct research on drug intelligence and community surveillance, which are crucial to understanding drug markets and use trends, identifying drug deterrent and interdiction opportunities and pursuing organized crime targets.

TREATMENT

Share Best Practices for Early Intervention

- BJA and COPS will highlight and promote successful models where law enforcement is assisting individuals who have overdosed by directing them to treatment programs, as well as connecting individuals who voluntarily seek help from law enforcement to treatment.

Support Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)

- In the near term, subject to funding, the department will support medication-assisted treatment by taking the following step: the Bureau of Prison (BOP) will commit to implementing a nationwide plan to expand medication-assisted treatment to all Residential Reentry Centers.

Promote Treatment Options Throughout the Criminal Justice System

In the near term, the department will support criminal justice system treatment models by taking the following steps:

- The National Institute of Corrections will draft and release a document for state, local and tribal correctional agencies compiling research and best practices for residential substance abuse treatment programs.
- BJA will draft and publicly release a document that highlights promising initiatives in communities throughout the United States that address the treatment needs of individuals with opioid use disorders who enter the criminal justice system.

To combat the opioid epidemic, the department's components must work together and with other federal, state, local and tribal agencies to seek a comprehensive solution. The strategy outlined in the U.S. Attorney memo, expressed in the Attorney General's letter to Governors and made possible through grants like BJA's Harold Rogers Prescription Drug Monitoring Program FY 2016 Competitive Grant Program, embraces an approach that focuses on prevention, enforcement and treatment, and identifies next steps that are immediately actionable.

For more on opioid week, please visit: <https://www.justice.gov/opioidawareness/heroin-opioid-awareness-week>.