

Durbin applauds administration action to address the prescription opioid abuse and heroin epidemic

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Earlier this month, Senator announced \$5.7 million in federal funding for Illinois to expand substance abuse treatment



WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today **U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL)** applauded [a new effort](#) by federal, state, local and private sector partners to address the ongoing problem of prescription drug and heroin addiction and abuse. Durbin especially welcomed the commitment of more than sixty medical schools across the country – including Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine and Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine of Midwestern University – to require their students take some form of prescriber education, in line with the newly released [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain](#), in order to graduate.

Earlier this month, the Senate approved the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act* which outlines an integrated approach to fighting heroin and opioid abuse. Durbin’s speech on the Senate floor about this legislation can be viewed on his [YouTube page](#) and a recent opinion piece summarizing his support is available on the [Rockford Register Star website](#).

“I’ve seen the impact of this heroin epidemic across my state. There isn’t a city too small or a suburb too wealthy to be spared as many addictions begin with the over-prescription of pain killers known as opioids,” said Durbin.

Over the last year, Durbin has met with local advocates, law enforcement officials, health professionals, and people affected by heroin and opioid addiction throughout Illinois to discuss ways to combat the growing problem.

Since 1999, the number of drug overdose deaths in the United States has more than doubled, and in most states the number now exceeds the number of traffic-related deaths. Drug overdose deaths are now the leading cause of preventable injury death, resulting in nearly 44,000 deaths each year, with most involving either prescription opioids or heroin. In Illinois, there were 1,652 opioid overdose deaths in 2014 – an increase of 29 percent since 2010.

Durbin has supported targeted strategies to address opioid abuse as part of a coordinated national effort, especially expanding access to treatment options like medication assisted therapies.

Medication-Assisted Therapies

Last year, HHS announced that it would be taking steps to revise the regulations that cap the number of patients a physician can treat with medication-assisted therapies, including buprenorphine. Despite studies showing medication-assisted therapies to be highly effective, there is significant under-treatment due to federal limitations. In 2012, of the 2.5 million Americans who abused or were dependent on opioids, fewer than one million received medication-assisted therapy.

Today, HHS issued a proposed rule to increase the current patient limit for qualified physicians who prescribe buprenorphine to treat opioid use disorders from 100 to 200 patients. Last year, state, local, and private sector partners committed to double the number of physicians certified to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder treatment, from 30,000 to 60,000 over the next three years. More information about today's proposal to expand access to treatment is available [here](#).

In May, Durbin cosponsored the Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment Act (TREAT Act). The bill would not only lift the cap on the number of patients physicians can treat using medication-assisted therapies, but it would also enable nurse practitioners and physicians assistants trained in addiction medicine to treat patients with medication assisted therapies.