

# **Senators urge DEA, CMS and insurers to improve enforcement of responsible opioid prescribing**

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*Ask how agencies and stakeholders are using new CMS database to identify overprescribing hotspots*

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today sent letters urging the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and commercial insurers to use public data to improve oversight of opioid prescribing practices and hold doctors accountable for overprescribing dangerous and addictive painkillers.

The Medicare Part D Opioid Prescribing Mapping Tool, developed by CMS under the Obama Administration, provides localized data on Medicare Part D opioid prescription claims across the United States. The senators believe it could be used to identify hotspots and prevent overprescribing and diversion.

“There are still too many providers who are prescribing opioids at rates significantly higher than their peers, and there are too many regions of the country where opioid dispensing is far beyond sensible medical need,” wrote the senators. “To this end, we were encouraged to learn that CMS has recently developed a Medicare Part D Opioid Prescribing Mapping Tool. This database provides a wealth of localized and aggregate prescriber data on Medicare Part D opioid claims based off geography, prescriber specialty, and overall volume. Notably, CMS identified that in 2014 there were 79.6 million Part D opioid prescriptions written for only 40 million enrollees—nearly two months’ worth of opioid painkillers for each enrolled senior.”

Senators Durbin and Duckworth also sent letters to Health Care Services Corporation (the parent company of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois), the Illinois State Medical Society, the Illinois Medical Licensing Board, and the Illinois Board of Dentistry asking how they have utilized the mapping tool to protect Illinoisans from the growing opioid epidemic.

Over the past 25 years, the number of opioid pain relievers prescribed in the United States has skyrocketed. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the number of opioid prescriptions have risen dramatically from approximately 76 million in 1991 to more than 245 million in 2014. The United States is by far the largest consumer of these drugs – accounting for almost 100 percent of the world total consumption of hydrocodone (e.g. Vicodin) and 81 percent of oxycodone (e.g. OxyContin). The increased frequency with which prescription opioids have been prescribed in recent years has played a major factor in our nation’s escalating heroin epidemic, including an alarming increase in opioid-related emergency room visits, opioid-related treatment admissions for abuse, and opioid-related overdose deaths. Between 2002 and 2013, the rate of heroin-related overdose deaths nearly quadrupled, with more than 8,200 people dying from heroin in 2013. According to the federal government’s National Survey on Drug Use and Health, four out of five current heroin users report that their opioid use began with prescription opioids.

