



# Durbin Introduces Bill To Combat Opioid Addiction As Nation Sees Rise In Overdose Deaths Amid COVID-19

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today introduced the *Addiction Prevention and Responsible Opioid Practices Act*, a bill to stem the opioid epidemic by expanding telehealth and treatment access and reining in the excessive volume of addictive opioids on the market. According to a [recent analysis](#) of opioid use in America, 128 people die in the United States each day due to opioid overdose and an estimated 1.7 million Americans suffer from substance use disorders related to prescribed opioid painkillers.

Cook County, Illinois, is on track to [double the number](#) of opioid-related deaths from 2019, with African Americans comprising a disproportionate number of overdoses. The coronavirus pandemic appears to be worsening the opioid addiction crisis. Faced with economic uncertainty, anxiety, and in some cases, isolation, many with substance use disorder are at heightened risk of misusing opioids, while facing greater barriers to accessing treatment. The American Medical Association (AMA) reports that more than [35 states](#) have seen an increase in opioid-related mortality. This coincides with a decline in harm reduction services, like sterile needle programs and access to naloxone.

“Tragically, our nation’s opioid epidemic is surging across our communities amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation holds Big Pharma accountable for fueling this crisis, improves opioid prescribing practices, and dramatically expands treatment—including telehealth services—for people who are battling addiction,” Durbin said.

U.S. Representative Matt Cartwright (D-PA-08) will be introducing the House companion version of Durbin’s legislation.

“The opioid epidemic continues to ravage communities and devastate families across the country. Sadly, the pandemic seems to be making matters worse,” Cartwright said. “This legislation calls for a coordinated effort between drug companies, public health officials and the medical community to halt the scourge of opioid addiction in America.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently [reported](#) that 2019 was the worst year on record for overdose fatalities, and estimates that as many [one in four patients](#) who is prescribed painkillers struggles with opioid addiction. Opioid painkiller misuse can also lead to heroin use; [80 percent](#) of people who use heroin first misused prescription painkillers. Between 1999 and 2016, both the death rates and sales from prescription opioid use have [quadrupled](#).

In 2018, the pharmaceutical industry put 11 billion opioid doses on the market, enough for every adult American to have a nearly three-week supply of painkillers. Despite attention on the opioid epidemic, hydrocodone/acetaminophen (e.g. Vicodin) remained the most prescribed medication in Illinois in 2018.

The *Addiction Prevention and Responsible Opioid Practices Act* is a comprehensive approach to preventing addiction before it starts and improving opioid prescribing practices. Specifically, the bill would:

- Establishes a tax on pharmaceutical manufacturers of opioids to fund drug treatment and takeback programs;
- Lift barriers to addiction and mental health treatment that have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, by expanding telehealth services to more urban and rural communities;
- Ensure behavioral health treatment services, including those provided by telehealth, are covered fairly by private health insurance companies;
- Establishes training and licensure requirements for pharmaceutical sales representatives who promote opioid painkillers (building off an initiative in the City of Chicago);
- Improve FDA oversight of opioid painkillers on the market and continuing education for prescribers
- Require continuing education for medical professionals who prescribe longer-term use of painkillers;
- Encourage medical schools to responsibly educate future doctors;
- Strengthen prescription drug monitoring systems to prevent over-prescribing and expand information sharing to identify individuals who may need help;
- Examine expansion of Medicare coverage for evidence-based alternatives to opioid treatments; and

This legislation is endorsed by the American Public Health Association and Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing.