

White House too focused on commerce side of opioid crisis, says public health expert

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The White House hosted a summit on March 1 to update Americans on the ways the Trump administration is fighting the opioid epidemic.

Dessa Bergen-Cico is an associate professor in the Department of Public Health and coordinator of the Addiction Studies program at Syracuse University's Falk College. Bergen-Cico's initial observation is that the White House is focused on "downstream" aspects of the problem that has to do with the pharmaceutical "commerce" aspects of the issue because these efforts are being headed by the Energy and Commerce Committee, rather than a health and preventive focus.

Bergen-Cico says:

"The upstream roots causes of addiction that need to be addressed are not unrelated to what needs to be done to address our country's pervasive mental health problems that are at the root of violence and suffering. There is a palpable uncivil tension in our society and people are looking for an accessible and reliable way to deal with it – unfortunately the quickest and easiest 'solutions' are narcotics and alcohol.

"Under the Energy and Commerce Committee, the emphasis is on [drug](#) development partnerships with the private sector to develop new pharmaceutical treatment for overdose, medically assisted treatment and non-[opioid](#) pain management. Whereas these are important in responding to the immediate crisis – it falls short of addressing what needs to be done 'upstream' in prevention.

"On the one hand, it is good to see that they appear to be holding opioid manufacturers accountable for their culpable role in the etiology of this crisis when the pharmaceutical industry falsely stated that opioids pain medications were not addictive. However, at the same time they are chastising the pharmaceutical companies and pharmaceutical distribution centers for the proliferation of [opioid drugs](#) they are also giving them the priority role in dealing with the crisis they created through new opportunities to make money on new drugs for overdose, medically assisted treatment and new pain management drugs."

Provided by Syracuse University

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