

Increasing health insurance coverage for addiction treatment is key to fighting opioid deaths

June 28 2018, by Theresa Kreif

People who suffer from an addiction to opioids and want to overcome their addiction should not be denied access to treatment by their insurance providers, according to new policy recommendations that were co-authored by Claudio Nigg, a professor in the Office of Public Health Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The most common reason why people who want but do not get [addiction](#) treatment is that government and private insurance programs don't cover the costs, according to a statement published June 27 on the website of the Society of Behavioral Medicine.

"To fight the opioid addiction epidemic that is ravaging the U.S. today, policymakers need to increase Medicaid funding for [addiction treatment](#) and declare the [opioid epidemic](#) to be a national emergency, and not just a [public health](#) emergency," Nigg says, explaining that this would provide more federal money for treatment programs.

On average every day, 78 people die in the U.S. from opioid-related overdose, and 3,900 people start taking a prescription opioid for a non-medical reason.

In Hawai'i, 77 people died from opioid-related overdose in 2016, the most recent year that statistics are available from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Studies have shown that an effective, evidence-based method of treatment for addiction is "medication-assisted treatment." These programs include two components: medications that decrease cravings, and behavioral therapy, such as counseling or talk therapy, which is what ultimately helps people to change their behaviors.

"Many insurance programs cover the cost of the medication, but not the counseling," Nigg says.

People who enter programs that don't provide behavioral therapy have poorer outcomes and higher relapse rates, research shows.

"People need the counseling, not just the pills, to overcome their addiction," he says.

Nigg is an expert on behavioral health science. Over his career, he has studied theories of behavior change, and has conducted research on what motivates [people](#) to engage in healthier behaviors.

Provided by University of Hawaii at Manoa

Citation: Increasing health insurance coverage for addiction treatment is key to fighting opioid deaths (2018, June 28) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-health-coverage-addiction-treatment-key.html>

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