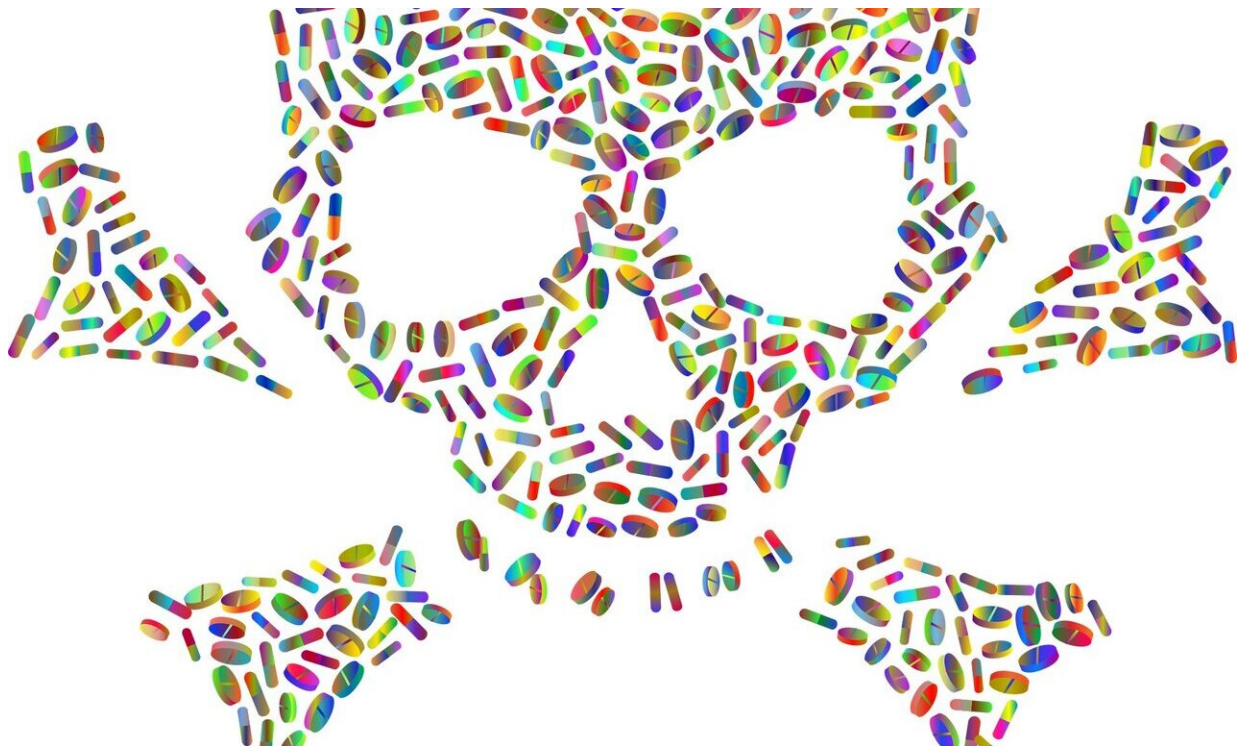


# Physician assistant programs adopt first-in-nation partnership to prevent opioid abuse

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Morbidity and mortality from prescription and synthetic opioid use and abuse continues to be a U.S. public health issue. In an effort to help curtail this crisis, researchers from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) describe an approach to ensure Physician Assistant (PA) students graduating from any PA program in Massachusetts will

have the knowledge and skills to prescribe opiates safely.

"As [health](#) care educators charged with preparing the next generation of Physician Assistants, faculty in PA programs can impact this growing public health crisis of [opioid](#) misuse," explained corresponding author Susan E. White, MD, Program Director, Physician Assistant Program at BUSM. "PA faculty have the potential to improve the education of our students and hopefully have a positive impact on patient outcomes in Massachusetts and other states where our graduates will practice."

As a result, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, along with the Massachusetts Association of Physician Assistants, created a working group for addressing the opioid crisis in the state by convening representatives from all nine PA programs to discuss curricular competencies as the Governor's Physician Assistant Education Working Group on Prescription Drug Misuse. The nine programs came together and adopted these competencies for a first-in-the-nation, cross-institutional partnership toward the prevention and management of prescription drug misuse.

In a Special Article in the *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*, the authors outline the consensus building techniques they used to build agreement. They also highlight the process used to bring all nine programs together and provide specific examples of how PA Programs teach students.

The authors feel the process, competencies and curricular innovations described in their article have the potential to serve as a road-map for the development of additional statewide, interdisciplinary collaborations around an educational approach to the opioid epidemic.

"It is encouraging to know that we can find common ground and, in doing so, we have the potential to improve the education of our students

and hopefully have a [positive impact](#) on patient outcomes," said White, who believes the process implemented in Massachusetts could be used to address other public health crises.

"Physician assistant students need to be prepared to prevent and treat opioid use disorder and opioid overdose," said DPH Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. "We were pleased to work with the PA schools in Massachusetts to incorporate addiction treatment into their school curricula."

**More information:** Susan E. White et al, Adopting Graduate Competencies in Opioid Prescribing for Massachusetts Physician Assistant Programs, *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education* (2019). [DOI: 10.1097/JPA.0000000000000276](https://doi.org/10.1097/JPA.0000000000000276)

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