

American Medical Association urges action, saying drug epidemic heading in wrong direction

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(HealthDay)—Despite a 44.4 percent decrease in opioid prescribing nationwide in the past decade, there has been an increase in drug-related overdoses and deaths, according to a report released Sept. 21 by the American Medical Association (AMA).

The AMA convened two task forces (2014 to 2019) that provided actionable and measurable recommendations and principles for physicians, state and [federal policymakers](#), and other stakeholders to combat the nation's drug overdose and death epidemic.

The new report shows that opioid prescriptions decreased by 44.4 percent between 2011 and 2020, including a 6.9 percent decrease from 2019 to 2020. Physicians and other health care professionals used the state prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) more than 910 million times in 2020. More than 104,000 physicians and other [health care professionals](#) have an "X-waiver" to allow them to prescribe buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid use disorder, an increase of 70,000 providers since 2017. Yet, 80 to 90 percent of people with a [substance use disorder](#) receive no treatment. In the report, the AMA listed a number of policy recommendations, including stopping prior authorization for medications to treat opioid use disorder, supporting harm reduction services, and improving data collection.

"Physicians have become more cautious about prescribing opioids, are trained to treat opioid use disorder, and support evidence-based harm reduction strategies. We use PDMPs as a tool, but they are not a panacea," Gerald E. Harmon, M.D., president of the AMA, said in a statement. "Patients need policymakers, health insurance plans, national pharmacy chains, and other stakeholders to change their focus and help us remove barriers to evidence-based care."

More information: [Press Release](#)
[Report](#)

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