

US pharmacy chain CVS to pay \$5 bn in opioid settlement

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US pharmacy chain CVS Health said Wednesday they had agreed to pay approximately \$5 billion over 10 years to "resolve all opioid lawsuits and claims" against them by states and cities.

The [opioid crisis](#), which has caused more than 500,000 deaths over 20 years in the United States, has triggered a flurry of lawsuits against drugmakers, distributors and pharmacies from victims as well as cities, counties and [states](#) impacted by the fallout.

"We are pleased to resolve these longstanding claims and putting them behind us is in the best interest of all parties, as well as our customers, colleagues and shareholders," CVS chief policy officer Thomas Moriarty said in a statement.

"We are committed to working with states, municipalities and tribes, and will continue our own important initiatives to help reduce the illegitimate use of prescription opioids," he added.

The agreement in principle covers claims by all governmental entities in the United States, the statement said.

The company, which is set to begin payouts next year, clarified that the settlement is "not an admission of any liability or wrongdoing."

"CVS Health will continue to defend against any litigation that the final agreement does not resolve," the statement said.

CVS chief executive officer Karen Lynch told an earnings call that the company recognizes "the seriousness of the opioid abuse misconduct has had on so many Americans."

"I just would say that we have made significant investments over the years to combat the opioid crisis and continue to do so through our leadership and our behavioral health company," she said when asked about the settlement.

Multiple lawsuits

Walgreens and Walmart have also agreed to settlements of at least \$4 billion and \$3 billion, according to a report by Bloomberg.

The two companies did not immediately confirm the report to AFP.

CVS earlier this year announced an agreement to pay \$484 million to the state of Florida to settle opioid claims, with the money set to fund treatments for [drug misuse](#) and health effects of the crisis.

The chain, along with Walgreens, Rite Aid and Walmart, agreed last summer to a \$26 million settlement with two counties in New York state.

And an Ohio jury last November sided with two of the state's counties that sued Walmart, Walgreens and CVS, determining the three companies acted illegally in filling significant opioid prescriptions, creating an "oversupply" of the drugs and a "public nuisance."

Such payouts from and decisions against retail pharmacies come alongside other large agreements involving drug manufacturers and distributors, which are alleged to have encouraged doctors to over-prescribe medication which they knew was potentially addictive.

Israeli drugmaker Teva in July announced an agreement in principle to pay more than \$4 billion to plaintiffs, and in March, Purdue Pharma reached an [agreement](#) with several US states to pay up to \$6 billion.

For many people, [opioid addiction](#) begins with prescribed pain pills, before they increase their consumption and eventually turn to [illicit drugs](#) such as heroin and fentanyl, an extremely powerful synthetic opioid.

Opioid victims and their families addressed the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, directly in a US courtroom in March as part of the

company's bankruptcy case.

"We buried Matthew and Kyle because of your family's vicious acts of disregard for human life," Liz Fitzgerald said of the deaths of two of her sons, who died at ages 32 and 25 after years of dealing with [opioid](#) addictions.

"Two boys are gone because of your 'safe' medication," Fitzgerald said.

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