

Publicis settles opioid case with US states for \$350 mn

February 1 2024



This handout photo from the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) shows 40 mg pills of OxyContin.

Publicis Health will pay \$350 million to settle charges from US states that its "predatory and deceptive marketing strategies" worsened the opioid epidemic, New York's top prosecutor said Thursday.

Publicis Health, part of the French advertising giant Publicis, worked

with Purdue Pharma between 2010 and 2019 on marketing material to promote OxyContin and other drugs, New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a press release.

She said the agreement was the first with an advertising agency for its role in the [opioid epidemic](#).

"For a decade, Publicis helped opioid manufacturers like Purdue Pharma convince doctors to overprescribe opioids, directly fueling the opioid crisis and causing the devastation of communities nationwide," James said.

Publicis said in a statement the settlement "is in no way an admission of wrongdoing or liability."

Publicis Health created pamphlets and brochures promoting OxyContin as "safe and unable to be abused," said the New York press release.

Other "aggressive" marketing efforts included working with McKinsey consultants on a program to target doctors who prescribed the most OxyContin with calls touting the drug, according to James.

The settlement distributes funds nationally, with New York garnering \$19.2 million of the total, James said.

Publicis described the opioid work as originating with Rosetta, a digital marketing firm the French company acquired in 2011 and shut down 10 years ago.

Rosetta's work on opioids employed tools and language "expressly" approved by US health officials, Publicis said.

It involved communications with [health care providers](#), not patients, the

company said.

"Rosetta's role was limited to performing many of the standard advertising services that agencies provide to their clients, for products that are to this day prescribed to patients, covered by major private insurers, Medicare, and authorized by State Pharmacy Boards," Publicis said.

"We recognize the broader context in which that lawful work took place. The fight against the opioid crisis in the United States requires collaboration," the company said.

"We are committed to playing our part. That is why we worked to reach this agreement, and why we are also reaffirming our long-standing decision to turn down any future opioid-related projects."

Of the \$350 million in the [settlement](#), \$343 million will go for payments to US states and territories and \$7 million for legal fees, Publicis said.

Since 1999, more than 800,000 people have died from an overdose involving any opioid, including prescription and illicit opioids, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Citation: Publicis settles opioid case with US states for \$350 mn (2024, February 1) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-publicis-opioid-case-states-mn.html>

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