

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “A Public Health Emergency: State Efforts to Curb the Opioid Crisis”
January 14, 2020

Today’s hearing continues the Committee’s ongoing, bipartisan efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. Whether fueled by prescription drugs or illicit synthetic opioids, this epidemic is a constantly evolving threat—putting people, families, and communities at grave risk.

This is not a crisis that we can resolve overnight, and it requires ongoing federal and state attention.

States are on the front lines of this national emergency, providing much of the support for those in need. They are our eyes and ears on what is occurring on the ground, and that’s why this hearing is so important.

It is the latest in a series of hearings we’ve held on the opioid crisis. In the past, we’ve heard from several states, including Rhode Island, about on-the-ground efforts to curb the epidemic. Last year, we also heard from federal agencies about the urgent threat posed by fentanyl.

The Committee also conducted a two-year bipartisan investigation into opioid distribution practices.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has also been at the forefront of passing critical legislation that gives our federal, state, and local partners the tools and resources required to succeed in this fight, including three pieces of legislation—all bipartisan—designed to give states funding and support.

In 2016, this Committee passed, and President Obama signed into law, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (“CARA”) and the 21st Century Cures Act. These two laws authorized over \$1 billion in state-specific grants, and helped states bolster evidence-based treatment, prevention, and recovery efforts.

In 2018, the SUPPORT Act was passed and signed into law reauthorizing opioid-specific funding, increasing opioid abuse and overdose prevention training, and improving coordination and quality of care.

And then, in December, the House passed H.R. 3, the Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which included \$10 billion in additional opioid funding.

This Committee is committed to making sure communities are receiving the support they need to get relief from this crisis.

And that's why we sent letters to 16 states last year requesting information on how federal funds have assisted states in this fight, and what additional help Congress can provide as we consider future action.

We wanted to know how states are using federal opioid funds, what is being done to ensure those funds reach the hardest hit regions, and how funds have helped transform state treatment systems. Based on the responses, we heard that the federal money has allowed states to take important and innovative approaches to addressing opioid addiction.

And one of the most effective tools that is available to the states is Medicaid. Several states elaborated on the important role of Medicaid in stemming this crisis in their responses to the Committee. A study released last week found that about 8,000 lives have been saved from an opioid overdose thanks to the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

We also want to hear about any emerging trends in substance abuse that they are seeing. For example, several states informed the Committee that while they continue to fight the opioid epidemic, they are also seeing an increase in methamphetamine and polysubstance use. This is an alarming trend that threatens to become the next epidemic, and I want to hear how Congress can help states confront this unfolding danger.

I thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to hearing about their states' efforts in combating this crisis.

Thank you, I yield back.