

**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Healthcare, Benefits, and
Administrative Rules hearing:
Local Responses and Resources to Curtail the Opioid Crisis
April 11, 2018**

On Wednesday, April 11, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Healthcare, Benefits, and Administrative Rules held a hearing titled, “Local Responses and Resources to Curtail the Opioid Crisis.”

For a webcast of the hearing and witness testimonies, see [here](#).

Witnesses who testified at the hearing included:

- Amy Haskins, Project Director, Jackson County Anti-Drug Coalition, West Virginia
- Lisa Roberts, Coordinator, Scioto County Drug Action Team Alliance, Ohio
- Derek Siegle, Executive Director, Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program
- Karen Ayala, Lead Staff, DuPage Heroin/Opioid Prevention and Education (HOPE) Task-Force, Illinois

The hearing evaluated local responses and initiatives to address the opioid epidemic, examined how federal grant programs have assisted state and local communities, and explored ways the federal government can effectively assist our states in combating the epidemic.

Subcommittee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH) kept his opening remarks brief and said, “we all know how bad this crisis is,” and turned over to Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) for his opening remarks and proceeded to the witness opening statements. Krishnamoorthi focused his statement on the importance of giving communities flexibility to respond to opioids, because what works in one area is not necessarily what will work in another; as well as the need to increase the supply and use of opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone.

Some of the key issues touched upon during the hearing are summarized below.

Naloxone

Rep. Krishnamoorthi asked Karen Ayala how Drug-Free Communities (DFC) funding has helped her region and Ayala said the DuPage Health Department used grant funds to make naloxone more available.

Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL) asked panelists to discuss naloxone and access to naloxone, given the recent report from the Surgeon General. Roberts replied that it is imperative that this drug is utilized, but there are still some hurdles to obtaining naloxone because it requires a prescription, so it can sometimes be difficult to navigate the system. She said in other countries it is an over the counter drug, and in Ohio, there have been some steps taken to make naloxone more available and you can now obtain naloxone at certain pharmacies without a prescription. She said regarding arming law enforcement and first responders with naloxone, the fact that the price of naloxone increases frequently, impedes use. Rep. Kelly said she and Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) have sent letters to President Trump urging him to address the high prices of prescription drugs and ensure this life saving drug is available for those who need it.

Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI) asked for statistics on states or localities that have seen reductions in opioid use as a result of federal funding. Haskins gave Huntington, WV as an example of a community that has seen a reduction in deaths due to funding for a program that distributes naloxone.

Prevention and Education

Many of the witnesses described the importance of prevention and education programs in their opening statements.

Responding to a question by Rep. Krishnamoorthi, Amy Haskins described how her coalition used DFC grant funds to establish a comprehensive public awareness campaign, educating the community on the dangers of opioid misuse as well implement prescription drug take back days.

Rep. James Comer (R-KY) asked witnesses to discuss how this epidemic affects rural areas and Haskins responded saying she is from a rural area as well and mentioned schools are seeing more children with learning disabilities from being exposed to neo-natal opioid use.

Drug Free Communities and ONDCP

All of the witnesses testified on the importance of the Drug-Free Communities (DFC) program to their communities in addressing the opioid epidemic.

Amy Haskins emphasized the importance of the DFC program, which is housed in the Office of National Drug Control Strategy (ONDCP) and is the only federal prevention program that goes directly to communities to tackle their local drug issues. She said the program promotes substance use prevention strategies and has helped her community respond to and address local drug crises as they arise and achieve significant reductions in opioid use and misuse despite the state of West Virginia having one of the highest rates in the country.

Lisa Roberts also praised the training, technical assistance, and programmatic support provided by ONDCP and urged the Committee to reauthorize the DFC program and ONDCP as well as allow DFC to remain in ONDCP so that the successful model is not disrupted.

Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)

When asked by Rep. Jordan what is single most important thing that can be done to address the opioid crisis, Haskins said putting parameters around MAT programs for adults in her area (but noted for youth, it would be prevention). Lisa Roberts responded to the same question saying increased access to MAT and lessening burdens to access MAT is most important. Ayala answered Rep. Jordan's question saying to integrate and expand access to substance use disorder treatment with a focus on public funding for those who are uninsured or underinsured.

Fentanyl

Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL) asked if more individuals are using prescription opioids or heroin and Roberts responded it depends on where you are from. She said right now, heroin is more widely used and also fentanyl. DeSantis asked her to elaborate on the increase in fentanyl, which she said is coming through the U.S. mail from China or is coming over the border. DeSantis said they passed a bill recently that tries to deal with this issue and emphasized the need to secure the U.S. border and supply needs to be reduced.

Rep. Gary Palmer (R-AL) mentioned a story that a man was recently arrested with enough Fentanyl to "kill everybody in Toledo," and said the North Koreans are also producing Fentanyl, which is coming

from Asia to Mexico and Canada, then over the border to the U.S. and that more border security is needed.

Medicaid

Rep. Jordan cited a study done by Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) that said Medicaid expansion contributed to the opioid epidemic and asked witnesses to respond. Haskins said she believed expansion, “has made it easier for access, yes.” Roberts said Ohio is a Medicaid expansion state, however had an opioid problem long before Medicaid expansion was implemented and it has helped people access treatment who were not able to before. Rep. Comer also asked panelists to elaborate on how Medicaid expansion may have led to overprescribing of opioids. Haskins responded saying she didn’t think it was an overprescribing issue as much anymore, and now is an issue in accessing addiction treatment and mental health treatment.

Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL) also asked about the correlation between states with the highest rates of opioid misuse and Medicaid Expansion, asking Lisa Roberts to elaborate on her opinion that expansion helped mitigate the epidemic, not exacerbate it. Roberts said while there may be truth to that theory, she reiterated that Ohio had no problem accessing prescription opioid medications before the state expanded Medicaid, and has helped those with SUDs access treatment.

Rep. Gary Palmer (R-AL) asked Amy Haskins if the children of individuals with opioid use disorders are more likely to be Medicaid recipients. She said she didn’t know, and it is hard to know with so many children being raised by grandparents, many of which are financially well off. Palmer said he has seen a CDC study from Washington state showing that those on Medicaid are 5-7 times more likely to die an opioid related death than those not on Medicaid.

Law Enforcement/ Drug and Family Courts

In his opening statement, Derek Siegle discussed his organization, the Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA) and how the HIDTA Program assists localities address the opioid problem and other drug crises. HIDTA with the assistance of ONDCP, developed the national Domestic Highway Enforcement (DHE) Initiative which promotes collaborative, intelligence-led, unbiased policing in coordinated and mutually supportive multi-jurisdictional law enforcement efforts in U.S. highways. HIDTA also provides critical overdose data, and free training to law enforcement. Roberts answered a question from Rep. Comer saying that her community has seen an increase in parental drug use and the DFC grants has allowed for the establishment of a family drug courts to keep families affected by substance use disorders (SUDs) intact.

Privacy and 42 CFR

Karen Ayala in her opening statement noted the importance of integrated care for individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) which requires the sharing of information between health professionals. She said while 42 CFR Part 2 may have been well intentioned at one time, but the passage of HIPAA has made the provision antiquated when it comes to treatment and can perpetuate the stigma associated with the disease of addiction. She asked the Committee to act on the recommendation of the President’s Opioid Commission to update privacy laws to ensure that information about SUDs are made available to all medical professionals treating and prescribing medication to patients. Ayala also encouraged Congress to review and restrict direct marketing of pain medications by pharmaceutical companies.