

April 12, 2019

Commitment Statement on Countering the US Opioid Epidemic

The Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) is the voice of accredited academic public health, representing schools and programs accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). The Association's 116 members include 63 schools of public health and 53 programs. ASPPH is a 501(c)(3) membership organization located in Washington, DC.

Our mission is to strengthen the capacity of members by advancing leadership, excellence, and collaboration for academic public health. The entire public health community has focused on both addressing the current opioid epidemic as well as in developing and evaluating prevention strategies to help reduce the chances of a future crisis, involving opioids or other addictive substances. Major legislative and policy initiatives to address the crisis have focused almost exclusively on expanding treatment options, developing new therapies and therapeutics to address intractable pain, and interdicting supplies of drugs of abuse.

More than 40 state attorneys general and hundreds of local, territorial and tribal governments have filed claims against participants in the opioid prescription drug supply chain seeking relief from the costs of the crisis to governmental units and to advance remedies that address current treatment needs and prevent abuse going forward. The federal suits have been consolidated in the court of US District Judge Daniel Polster. There are reports of ongoing settlement talks between the parties and several settlement conferences have been scheduled. ASPPH believes a master settlement agreement could provide an opportunity to advance public health approaches to address the crisis.

ASPPH and its members have repeatedly called on policy makers to support "public health approaches" to address the substance abuse crisis. Late last year, the Association formed a "Task Force on Public Health Interventions to Address the Opioid Crisis." The 15 members of the Task Force are recognized experts in their respective fields and come from various disciplines and organizations, both within the public health community and from allied fields.

The Task Force is charged with defining "public health approaches" for the prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder, the mitigation of other consequences of opioid use (e.g., HCV, HIV, endocarditis, and others), and in consideration of related sub-epidemics (e.g., methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, and others); describing how such approaches should be assessed, and clarifying for policy makers why such approaches are essential and how they complement other policy initiatives that address harmful substance use; identifying a range of initiatives that reflect such an approach, including who might lead each initiative's implementation, how it might be advanced, and the optimal outcome; determining which initiatives might be undertaken with revenue resulting from litigation brought by public sector entities (states, territories, tribes, cities, or localities) against opioid manufacturers and distributors, as well as any other agreements reached pursuant to similar litigation; and, prioritizing which initiatives should be included in the Association's federal advocacy agenda.

The Task Force's report and detailed recommendations will be available early this summer.

(revised April 24, 2019)