

NEWS BITES

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of *News Bites*, the bimonthly newsletter of the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association (LAPPA). Each issue will highlight unique news articles from around the United States in the areas of public health and safety, substance use disorders, and the criminal justice system. Every other month, LAPPA will feature stories that you may have missed but are important to the field. We hope you find *News Bites* informative, and if you do, tell a friend about it. Feel free to provide us feedback at info@thelappa.org.

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Advanced Brain Imaging Reveals What Scientists Think May be a Key Mechanism of Opioid Addiction: Scripps Research scientists discovered a molecular process in a person's brain cells that may be a major cause of drug addiction. The study used an advanced imaging technique on subjects that demonstrated brain cell activity in the area of the human brain that is associated with addiction while they were on an opioid. The scientists found that "key brain-cell changes that occur with addiction and help sustain addiction behavior are accompanied by—and plausibly driven by—particular changes in a signaling system involving a messenger molecule called cyclic AMP (cAMP)." The next step in the study is for the scientists to test whether the cAMP changes may be reversed through an intervention and reduce symptoms including drug cravings and withdrawal malaise. They also will attempt to see how cAMP signaling underlies cognitive and motivational processes. Their findings may allow them to tailor addiction treatments to each individual. For a summary of the study, visit <https://www.scripps.edu/news-and-events/press-room/2019/20191022-martemyanov-opioid.html>

Identifying Those Most Vulnerable to Opioid Use Disorder: A recent study conducted by neuroscience, addiction, and behavioral health researchers at the University of Southern California (USC) and published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* found that the many advancements in brain science can help identify individuals who are vulnerable to becoming addicted to substances before they are exposed to such substances. The research also found that brain science can determine how to treat anyone who has become addicted to a substance. The study “makes the case that understanding the neurobiological mechanisms underlying drug-seeking behaviors is critical, as is finding evidence-based prevention strategies for opioid abuse in particular and substance abuse in general.” For a summary of the study, visit <https://news.usc.edu/161464/opioid-addiction-brain-science-usc-study/>.

High Blood Pressure Drug Found to Mitigate Symptoms of Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome: In a study in which researchers abruptly discontinued the opioid regime of 602 people suffering from opioid use disorder (OUD) and provided half of them with a placebo and the other half with lofexidine, a medication used to treat high blood pressure, those receiving the lofexidine were better able to control their symptoms of opioid withdrawal syndrome (OWS). Approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for OWS in May 2018, lofexidine lessens the symptoms (e.g., vomiting and pain) associated with the abrupt discontinuation of continuous opioid use as compared to the placebo. The researchers who presented their findings at the 2019 Psych Congress in early October 2019 stated that “lofexidine effectively mitigates OWS symptoms during peak withdrawal, a critical period for OWS treatment and subsequent transition to OUD treatment.” To read more about the study, visit <https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/home/conference-highlights/us-psych-congress-2019/lofexidine-may-effectively-mitigate-symptoms-of-opioid-withdrawal-syndrome/>.

CVS Strengthening its Safe Drug Disposal Strategy in Massachusetts: CVS Health recently announced that it is planning to install 56 new safe medication disposal kiosks in its stores throughout Massachusetts, effectively doubling the existing number of existing disposal sites. According to the company, these sites have resulted in the safe disposal of 57,000 pounds of unused and unwanted medications. Looking beyond Massachusetts, CVS has committed to facilitating safer disposal at all its retail locations by 2020, with efforts including donating disposal units to law enforcement agencies and installing an additional 1,000 kiosks in pharmacies. Patients who fill their prescriptions at a CVS pharmacy that does not have a disposal kiosk will be sent home with disposal packets that combine warm water and a powder to encapsulate medication in a biodegradable gel, rendering pills unusable and safe to dispose. For more information, visit <https://cvshealth.com/thought-leadership/cvs-health-expands-safe-medication-disposal-in-Massachusetts>.

New York City Council Bans Preemployment Marijuana Testing: The New York City Council passed a law that goes into effect in May 2020 that prohibits employers from requiring a prospective employee to submit to a drug test for the presence of THC, the principal psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, as a condition of employment. A handful of exceptions to the law exist for specific law enforcement, security-sensitive, medical, and childcare positions. Human resource (HR) experts expect the law to impact HR policies throughout the nation since many companies have a national presence, and it is too difficult for such companies to have different HR policies which may then be deemed to be discriminatory. Moreover, experts expect that other jurisdictions will pass similar laws, particularly as medical and recreational marijuana become prevalent in more and more states. To learn about the new law, visit

<https://www.amny.com/news/work-drug-testing-1.36788514> and

<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/NYC-COUNCIL-PASSES-MARIJUANA-PRE-EMPLOYMENT-TESTING-BAN.html?soid=1102557709761&aid=2XPPaWqTMvA>.

Department of Health Repaying Loans for Those Who Provide Opioid Use Disorder

Treatment: Under a new program aimed at increasing the availability of treatment in Michigan, the state's Department of Health and Human Services is making medical providers who offer medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder eligible for student loan repayment. Providers in a variety of settings become eligible for \$15,000 to \$30,000 of loan repayment if they begin providing MAT or increase their current patient load. The program is currently available to medical doctors, doctors of osteopathic medicine, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and substance use disorder counselors who are trained to provide buprenorphine under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act. As with many states throughout the country, Michigan has been severely impacted by the opioid epidemic, with the number of overdose deaths tripling annually since 2011. The loan repayment program is one component of the state's developing action plan, which is focused on prevention, early intervention, and treatment. For more information about the program, visit www.michigan.gov/opioids.

Analysis Shows the Staggering Cost of the Opioid Epidemic: According to a recent analysis by the Society of Actuaries (SOA), the nation's opioid epidemic cost \$631 billion dollars in the four-year period from 2015 to 2018. The published report is the culmination of the inaugural study from the SOA's Mortality and Longevity Strategic Research Program which looks at existing research and builds upon it through an examination and analysis of the factors and longevity trends that affect mortality predictions. The report's authors focused on a number of relevant economic areas including healthcare, premature mortality, criminal justice activities, child and family assistance education programs, and lost productivity. For more information and to read the full report, visit www.soa/resources/research-reports/2019/econ-impact-non-medical-opioid-use/.

Huge Drop in Opioid Prescriptions in the State of New Jersey: Following a major change to state law, New Jersey has experienced a 22 percent drop in the number of opioids dispensed per new prescription. The state code now limits new opioid prescriptions to a five-day limit and an electronic health record alert notifies clinicians when that limit has been reached. The recent study, authored by a medical doctor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, is one of the first evaluations of the state law's impact on prescribing practices and outcomes, and is the first report of an electronic medical record being used to facilitate compliance with prescribing limitations. The study notes that after the prescribing limit and automatic alert were in place, there was no evidence that pain control worsened. To date, more than 30 states, as well as some insurers and pharmacy chains, have implemented limits on new opioid prescriptions as a way to decrease exposure. Preliminary study results were presented at the Society of General Internal Medicine Annual Meeting in May 2019 and the complete study as published in the Journal of Internal Medicine. For more information, visit <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2019/october/new-opioid-prescription-dosages-drop-22-percent>

Certain African American Adults See Rise in Opioid Deaths: According to a new study, African American adults in large metropolitan areas are experiencing increasing rates of drug overdose deaths involving opioids and synthetic opioids. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that black adults saw increases in drug overdose deaths of 103 percent and 361 percent respectively for opioids and synthetic opioids. Traditionally, the African American community has had a relatively low opioid-involved overdose rate, but recent increases in the availability and abuse of synthetic manufactured fentanyl has fueled the rise in overdose rates. Current trends indicate that more efforts are needed, such as community-specific education that emphasizes the dangers of synthetic opioids. For more information, visit https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6843a3.htm?s_cid=mm6843a3_w.

SAMHSA Updates its Treatment Locator Website: The treatment locator website hosted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has been available for almost 20 years. However, SAMHSA, in cooperation with the Trump Administration, recently unveiled its updated website in order to make it easier for clinicians and their patients who suffer from substance use disorders (SUDs) and mental health issues to find treatment. The new website is more user-friendly, as it now allows users to search by zip code and includes specific preferences, such as outpatient facilities, LGBTQ-focused programs, telemedicine providers, and more. Users can also search by the type of payments that are accepted or what type of medication-based treatment is available. To visit the site, visit www.findtreatment.gov.

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