HHS to Spend Additional $94M in 2016 to Fight Opioid Addiction

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will spend $94 million in additional Affordable Care Act (ACA) funding this year to help combat the country's growing prescription opioid abuse and heroin epidemics, as stated in an announcement by HHS Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell. The influx of emergency money, which will go to 271 health centers across 41 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, will focus on expanding substance abuse treatment services in underserved populations, according to AIDS.gov.

The HHS estimates that there are more than 4.5 million Americans who are currently non-medical prescription opioid users, and that there are 289,000 people in this country who currently use heroin. Accidental overdose deaths from pain pills have nearly quadrupled since 1999, and between 2012 and 2013 (the latest years for which data are available) heroin-related overdose deaths also rose by nearly 39 percent.

"The opioid epidemic is one of the most pressing public health issues in the United States today, said Burwell during her announcement. The HHS plan will focus its funding on three key areas: improving opioid prescribing practices, expanding overdose prevention and increasing access to medication-assisted therapy, like suboxone and methadone for opioid addiction.

The goal of these new cash rewards is to dramatically increase the number of people screened for substance abuse disorders in the United States, connect them to care and increase their access to medication-assisted therapy for opioid addiction. The plan is expected to help designated awardees to hire more than 800 providers overall in substance abuse clinics across the country to treat nearly 124,000 new clients with addiction.

In addition to the harm-reduction focused approach to combating opioid addiction, some HHS funding will go toward increasing the use and awareness of naloxone, a drug that can help reverse an opioid overdose, and providing training and educational resources to health professionals nationwide to make more informed prescribing decisions when it comes to opioid painkillers.

To view a list of the award winners, click here.

To find an HRSA-approved substance abuse health center in your area, click here.

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