DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control

Hearing Title

The Federal Responses to the Drug Overdose Epidemic

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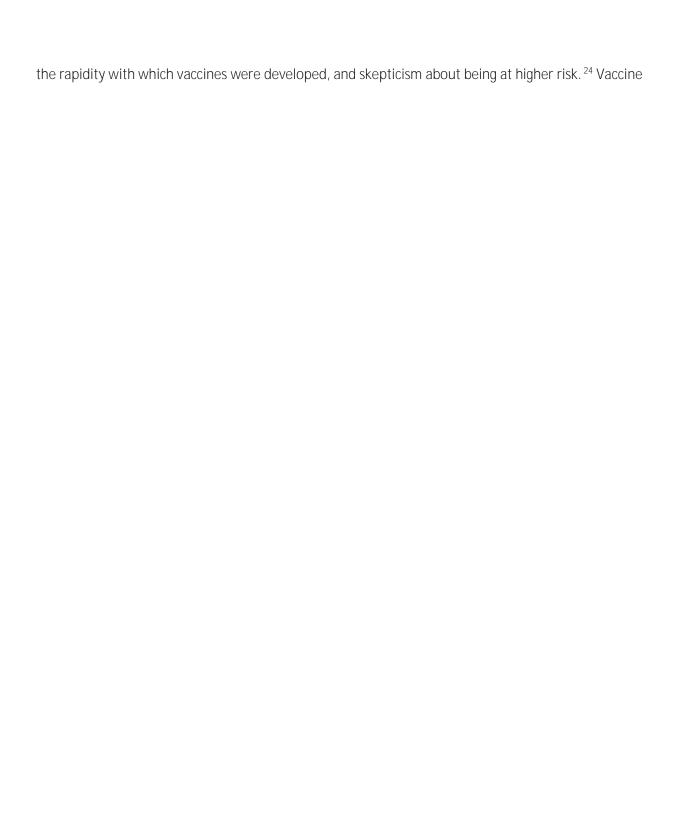
Chairman Whitehouse, Co-Chairman Grassley, and members of the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, thank you for inviting the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to participate in this hearing. Our mission at NIDA is to use science to address addiction in all its complexity, and I am glad for the opportunity to speak to you today } \u03b4 \u03b4

Impact of the COVID 9 Pandemic on Drug Use and Overdose

The twin addiction and overdose crises have collided with the COVID-19 pandemic, each exacerbating the deleterious effects of the other, resulting in increased rates of substance use and overdose, and increased risk for serious effects of COVID-19 illness. Large increases in many kinds of drug use and overdose have been recorded since March 2020, when a national emergency was declared and our lives radically changed due to lockdown and the closure of businesses and schools. Several reports have revealed increases in the number of positive urine drug screens for fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. There have also been increases in cannabis and alcohol use, especially among people with anxiety and depression and those experiencing COVID-19-related stress. Further, state and local data suggest substantial increases in emergency visits for drug overdose, including nonfatal overdose, despite a decline in overall non-COVID emergency department visits. Respectively.

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that drug overdose deaths reached an estimated 93,000 deaths in 2020, a nearly 30 percent g0.051 G(d)3(eat)-2(h)3(s76l2 0 612 792 reWħl

and sustain recovery. Researchers have long recognized the strong correlation between stress and substance use, particularly in prompting relapse. Although exposure to stress is a common occurrence



NIDA Researc Addressing SUD and Overdose

For the past nearly five decades, NIDA-supported research has led to the development of effective prevention and treatment interventions for SUD, providing hope for the more than 20 million people in the United States diagnosed with SUD and their loved ones. Although significant strides in establishing-evidence-based practices have been made, there is far more work to be done to develop new prevention and treatment interventions and to implement existing effective interventions with fidelity, for diverse populations, and at scale. In particular, developing strategies to prevent and treat opioid and stimulant use, addiction, and overdose will continue to be key priorities for NIDA.

Prevention

Preventing the initiation of substance use and minimizing the risks of harmful consequences are essential components of addressing SUD. NIDA prevention research aims to understand and intervene upon risk and resilience mechanisms for addiction and common comorbidities. Under the Helping to End Addiction Long TermSM or HEAL InitiativeSM, NIDA leads prevention research aimed at adolescent and young adult populations that are at highest risk for opioid misuse and OUD.³² Goals of the program include preventing individuals with low-severity OUD from developing a more serious OUD; building strategies to keep people in medication treatment for opioid addiction; understanding the role of sleep dysfunction in OUD and recovery; stopping at-risk adolescents from developing OUD; and exploring co42.024 445.ring

responded in real time to the COVID-19 pandemic with additional research to study COVID testing protocols in justice-involved populations.

HEALing Communities Study

The HEALing Communities Study, also part of the HEAL Initiative, is a multisite implementation research study investigating coordinated approaches for deploying evidence-based strategies to prevent and treat opioid misuse and OUD tailored to the needs of local communities. Research sites are partnering with 67 communities highly affected by the opioid crisis in four states to measure the impact of these efforts. The ambitious goal of the study is to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths by 40 percent over three years. Despite the impacts of COVID-19 on research, the HEALing Communities study was able to launch a key aspect of its program, a diverse communications campaign to increase awareness and demand for evidence-based practices and to reduce stigma against people with OUD and those taking medications for OUD. The communications of the program against people with OUD and those taking medications for OUD.

Driving Solutions through Technological Innovation

NIDA leverages

and other innovative products demonstrate that pairing sound science with biotechnology entrepreneurship has great potential benefit for our underserved patient population.

NIDA Research on the Intersection of SUD and COMID

In March 2020, NIDA responded to the urgent research need posed by the pandemic by issuing a Notice of Special Interest to solicit research at the intersection of COVID- í \tilde{o} v • μ • \tilde{s} v μ • X t [\dot{A} (μ v more than 100 supplemental research studies under this announcement, which was renewed this year. One of the areas of research NIDA is prioritizing is to understand how changes in healthcare policies implemented due to the pandemic, such as telehealth expansion and changes in the methadone takehome dose policy, have affected addiction treatment access and outcomes. Recognizing that many people with SUDs do not have computers or smartphones, NIDA is also focusing on other innovative methods, such as combining telemedicine with street outreach to help ensure that all people receive the care they need.

Through supplements to the HEALthy Brain and Child Development (HBCD) and Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) studies, we have been able to capitalize on existing infrastructure for longitudinal studies to examine the impact of COVID-19 on child development. HBCD, part of the HEAL Initiative, will add to our understanding of early brain development trajectories from the prenatal period through ages 9-10 by determining how environmental factors, including maternal drug exposure, substance use, and COVID-19 influence early brain development and clinical outcomes such as mental illnesses and addiction. ABCD is following nearly 12,000 children from age 9-10 through the subsequent decade, a period likely to capture the initiation of substance use behaviors. This study will determine how childhood experiences interact to affect brain development and social, behavioral, academic, and health outcomes, including substance use and COVID-19. Together, these studies will lead to a better understanding of typical brain and cognitive development and how they are affected by drugs and other environmental exposures.

NIDA is also pleased to be participating in several of the large trans-NIH COVID-19 initiatives made possible with the generous support of Congress. For example, NIDA is participating in the Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics Underserved Populations, or RADx-UP, Initiative, which aims to expand COVID-19 testing among underserved and medically and/or socially vulnerable populations; NIDA has ensured that people with SUD are recognized as one such population and are included in this research. We are also leading a program under the RADx-Radical initiative to accelerate methods for detecting SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater as a means of improving community-level surveillance of the virus. This project takes advantage of knowledge and expertise NIDA has developed through research on wastewater surveillance of drug use.

Building Partnership

Partnerships are critical for NIDA research to make a positive impact on public health. **E** / **[•** commitment to synergistic cooperation takes many different forms, designed to better respond to emergent issues or chronic needs in the public health arena. This includes working with a wide range of partners including state and local governments; sister agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services such as SAMHSA, FDA, and CDC; the Department of Justice; the White House Office on National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP); and with private industry.