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## CDC: Prescription Opioid Abuse Costs \$78.5 Billion

September 15, 2016

By Pat Anson, Editor

A new analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates the total “economic burden” of prescription opioid abuse in the United States at \$78.5 billion a year.

Researchers at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control – the same agency that oversaw development of the CDC’s controversial opioid prescribing guidelines – analyzed economic data from 2013 associated with opioid abuse, including the cost of health care, lost productivity, substance abuse treatment and the criminal justice system.

“A large share of the cost is borne by the public sector, both through direct services from government agencies, but also through tax revenue that will be lost from reduced earnings. Also, the health care sector bears approximately one third of the costs we have estimated here,” wrote lead author Curtis Florence, a senior health economist at CDC.

Florence and his colleagues estimated that nearly two million Americans abuse or are dependent on opioids. Their study is published online in *Medical Care*, the official journal of the American Public Health Association.

“More than 40 Americans die each day from overdoses involving prescription opioids. Families and communities continue to be devastated by the epidemic of prescription opioid overdoses.” said CDC Director Tom Frieden, MD, in a news release.



“The rising cost of the epidemic is also a tremendous burden for the health care system.”

Exactly what that burden is is open to conjecture. The researchers admit that some of their data is flawed because they relied on death certificates codes – which often fail to distinguish between deaths associated with prescription opioids and those caused by heroin. Heroin users and prescription opioid users are essentially lumped together – even though heroin users are far more likely to enter the criminal justice system.

In addition, opioids associated with death were considered a sign of abuse even if multiple drugs were involved. No distinction was made if the deaths were accidental, intentional or undetermined.

“Our health care cost estimates used the definition of opioid abuse and dependence identified by ICD-9 diagnosis codes. This definition does not differentiate between prescription opioids and heroin,” said Florence. “We did not attempt to attribute costs to specific drugs if multiple types of drug abuse were

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reported. This could bias our results if the health care cost impact of abuse and dependence is different between prescription opioids and heroin, or if abuse of prescription opioids alone has a different effect from abuse of multiple drugs,"

The researchers also were unable to distinguish between the "nonmedical" use of opioids by someone who obtained the drugs illegally and those who obtained them legally through a prescription.

"It is extremely difficult to measure all costs to society from an epidemic. In this case, there are many costs we were unable to measure, such as the reduction in quality of life of those who are dependent," wrote Florence.

Despite these limitations, the CDC research team said their estimates should be considered by healthcare providers and regulators in deciding whether prescription opioids should be used to treat pain.

"In the ideal case, decision makers could use these estimates when weighing the benefits and risks of using opioids to treat pain, and evaluating prevention measures to reduce harmful use. However, at the present time a full accounting of both the benefits and costs of prescription opioid use is not available," they wrote.

The CDC estimate of \$78.5 billion as the annual cost of prescription opioid abuse is only a fraction of the total cost of chronic pain on society. Using data from 2008, researchers from Johns Hopkins University estimated that the economic cost of pain in the United States ranged from \$560 to \$635 billion annually.

The CDC's opioid guidelines discourage primary care physicians from prescribing opioid for chronic pain. Although voluntary, anecdotal reports from patients and doctors suggest the guidelines are being widely adopted by many prescribers. Some states have even adopted the CDC guidelines as official policy or in legislation.

The CDC has released no estimate on the economic impact of its guidelines or on the reduction in quality of life for pain patients who are no longer able to obtain opioids.



*"We are miserably losing this fight to prevent fentanyl from entering our country and killing our citizens. We are losing this fight predominately through China. This must become a top tier diplomatic issue with the Chinese."*

— White House opioid commission

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 **Jonathan** 11 months ago

"Nearly two million" Americans abuse or are dependent on opioids...really? Only 2 million? If they're going to tell an absolute bald-faced lie, why not make it a real whopper? How about 17 million, or 35 million?

There is not now, nor has there ever been, an "opioid epidemic". Period. Every time they trot that word out, we need to call them on it.

 **Steven** 11 months ago

As a disabled Veteran who went on pain killers as a last resort back in 2001, is this now how the government justifies leaving me bedridden instead of being someone who was walking 2 miles daily and taking online courses in foreign language and Seminary study?


They are creating the very issues they say they worry about which is increased use of street drugs and more Veteran suicides. Truly the inmates are in charge of the mental institution known as the Federal Government and neither Party has any answer except more and more of the same insanity. "We had to destroy the city in order to save it." was a quote from a General during the war I fought in Vietnam. May as well use the same quote for people in severe pain who can no longer get relief for it and are being blamed for not "appreciating the help we are now receiving."

 **Janice Reynolds** 11 months ago


"This could bias our results if the health care cost impact of abuse and dependence is different between prescription opioids and heroin, or if abuse of prescription opioids alone has a different effect from abuse of multiple drugs," IF, IF? You have heard of creative accounting, right-now the CDC is giving new meaning to the term creative statistics.

When studies have been done in the past as to the cost of someone living with pain (especially not controlled), the CDC, and PROP have poo-pooed them

Pam: remember- Passive genocide. This is their goal.

 **Pam** 11 months ago

Janice, Oh you are so right, I don't understand this nightmare anymore, where is the AMA to make a stand for human beings! that they took an oath to do no harm!

 **Pam** 11 months ago

Now why would the CDC want to release anything to do with the thousands and thousands, millions even, of chronic pain pts who are being forced into a torturous hell. I am so effin sick of the bs coming out of the CDC. The DEA, CDC, FDA and more are killing innocent people by denying us our pain medication! I myself, do not know how much longer I can exist like this, I have done everything I was told to do by the medical community and because their surgeries have failed me and made me worse, they no longer want you around. I am sick of being labeled , sick of being denied medication that gave me a quality of life! In the release of Hillary Clinton's medical records, it states that she takes thyroid meds and allergy meds. Hmm how about she get denied those meds?!? How many in congress are on some form of medication!? The DEA, CDC, FDA!? Come on, these corrupt pos's follow no rules, they have everything they will ever need, private drs, private pharmacies, god forbid they should know what real suffering is, what having intractable pain is, pain that rips your body apart from the inside out and not just physically, but mentally and emotionally too. The DEA needs to be thrown out with yesterday's garbage, they are doing nothing to help the public, they are sending chronically ill people to the streets for relief, turning them into criminals, which is what they want, or worse death. In their eyes, the suffering are worthless and contribute nothing to society so why bother saving us right!?!? Screw you DEA and your sidekicks, CDC, FDA, and every congressman/woman, may they know what

its like to curl up in a ball in severe pain begging god to take them, like i do everyday because of thier actions!

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