



COMMITTEE ON  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
DEMOCRATS  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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## **Pallone: Health Coverage is Key to Addressing the Opioid Crisis**

*“If Republicans are successful in passing Trumpcare, we will end up going in the opposite direction when it comes to fighting the drug problem.”*

**Washington, D.C.** – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks at an Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on “Combating the Opioid Crisis: Battles in the States:”*

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on this critical issue. As you know, our Committee has held several hearings on the ongoing opioid crisis, including one in March. The opioid epidemic is not letting up, and neither can our efforts to fight it.

Since our last hearing, many more lives have been destroyed. There is no community that remains completely untouched by the opioids crisis.

Recently, the CDC reported that the opioid prescribing rate has peaked, but it remains far too high – with enough opioids to keep every American medicated around-the-clock for three weeks.

I am glad we have states here today so we can hear about what they are seeing on the front lines, what successful approaches they have found that deserve to be replicated, and what challenges they still face.

I would also like to hear from our witnesses about how the federal government can help. While it is important that states be empowered to address the particular challenges of their communities, our response to this epidemic cannot be 51 separate efforts. We must harness our national resources, data, and cooperation to get this crisis under control.

But as we talk about a public health crisis of this magnitude, there is an elephant in the room that needs to be addressed. Coverage for substance abuse treatment is how an individual—and society—has a fighting chance to kick the opioids epidemic for good. Health coverage is one of our strongest weapons in the battle against the opioids epidemic and the devastation it causes in our families and communities. Yet Republicans persist in their attempts to gut

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the Medicaid program by capping it permanently, and ending Medicaid Expansion as part of its efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Repealing the ACA and replacing it with Trumpcare would be devastating to 74 million Americans who receive critical health care services from the program. Today, one in five Americans receive their health insurance from Medicaid, half of all the babies born in this country are financed by Medicaid, and to the working poor – many of whom are hit hard by the opioids epidemic and are eligible for Medicaid for the first time through the ACA's expansion of the program – Medicaid is quite literally the only affordable health insurance available. Make no mistake: state Medicaid programs are at the center of the opioids epidemic.

Yet, in the House-passed Trumpcare, CBO determined that 23 million Americans would lose coverage, the majority of them covered through Medicaid, with \$834 billion in cuts to the program. The Senate's version of Trumpcare is no better—cutting Medicaid by a full 35 percent over the next two decades. These cuts could not come at a worse time from the perspective of the opioids crisis—for states and for the people who depend on the coverage Medicaid provides. There is no substitute for coverage for our states or for the people that need care.

And, as the Senate continues to make cosmetic changes to its bill with only one goal in mind – passing any bill out of the Senate, let's be very clear: no one-time amount of funds, whatever that amount may be, will ever replace the certainty of comprehensive coverage. No cosmetic changes can effectively offset the damage that would be caused by repealing the ACA, and cutting hundreds of billions of dollars from the Medicaid program.

Mr. Chairman, we must stay vigilant in this fight and remain open to any solution that shows promise, and so I thank you for having this hearing.

But I believe that there is no way this crisis can be solved with one-time infusions of resources, and it will only get worse if Medicaid dollars are removed from the fight.

We must invest in our health care system and its critical public programs for the long term. Medicaid is clearly a critical pillar that should be strengthened, not decimated. I fear that if Republicans are successful in passing Trumpcare, we will end up going in the opposite direction when it comes to fighting the drug problem that has so devastated our communities and our districts back home.

Thank you and I yield back.

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