



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

DEMOCRATS

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**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “What is the Federal Government Doing to Combat the Opioid
Abuse Epidemic?”**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

May 1, 2015

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today – the third in a series on the opioid abuse epidemic. This problem has affected every one of our districts, and I am glad this subcommittee is taking a serious look at this issue.

Today’s hearing gives us the opportunity to hear from federal government agencies about what they are doing to tackle the opioid addiction crisis. I am pleased to see that Secretary Burwell and the Department are taking important steps on both the prevention and the treatment of opioid abuse and I look forward to working with them on addressing this burgeoning crisis. To that end, it is critical also that we approach this problem on both sides of this issue—upstream where overprescribing is occurring—and downstream, where better treatment across this country is desperately needed.

The opioid addiction and abuse epidemic is inextricably tied to the overprescribing of these drugs for the treatment and management of chronic pain. I want to hear from you about how we can reduce the overprescribing of opioids and assist medical professionals in making informed prescribing decisions.

On the treatment side, we need to focus our attention on what works. There is consensus in the medical community that medication-assisted treatment – or MAT – is an essential component of effective treatment. However, it is still not available in large parts of the country and as others have already told this Committee, many Americans are receiving outdated and ineffective treatment. We need to understand why that is the case and how we can increase access to the most effective treatment protocols currently available.

I also want to use today's hearing as an opportunity to hear from these federal agencies about the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. When we passed the law, we took significant steps to expand access to health care for all Americans, including those with substance use disorders.

For many, the lack of insurance or the cost of treatment presents an insurmountable barrier to receiving the treatment help they need. The Affordable Care Act addresses some of these problems by expanding insurance coverage and requiring that insurance cover the cost of substance abuse services. This will mean that millions of people will have access to the tools they need to break their addictions.

Additionally, the Affordable Care Act provides us with a historic opportunity to transform a fragmented, underfunded system for treating substance abuse disorders into one that promotes coordinated, patient-centered care. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Frank and others about how the Affordable Care Act is transforming the landscape for behavioral health services, and what more needs to be done to truly integrate behavioral health services into our broader healthcare system.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing and to all our witnesses. I look forward to continuing our work on this issue.