



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., as prepared for delivery  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Hearing on “What are the State Governments Doing to Combat the Opioid Abuse  
Epidemic?”**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today’s hearing and for your due diligence in investigating the opioid abuse epidemic. I’m glad this Subcommittee is devoting significant attention to this issue because like all of the Members here today, I am concerned about what is happening in my state.

A New Jersey state official recently reported that more than 6,000 people in the state have died from overdoses since 2004. He also reported that more teens are dying from drug overdoses in New Jersey than car accidents.

Today, we are hearing from state health officials about ongoing efforts within their agencies to combat this epidemic. I know you all are dealing with many aspects of this issue, from reducing opioid prescribing rates to increasing access to treatment to programs.

I look forward to hearing about the work you are doing, and I hope you all can learn from each other as well.

I also want to hear from all of the witnesses today how we as the federal government can help fight this epidemic. We heard earlier this month from a number of federal agencies about their work, but I want to make sure we are supporting the states in their efforts to address the epidemic.

We have heard repeatedly throughout this series of hearings that significant barriers to treatment for substance use disorders still exist. For example, SAMHSA’s 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that nearly 40% of individuals who made an effort to seek treatment were unable to get treatment due to lack of health coverage and the prohibitive cost of treatment. Another 8% reported that they had health coverage, but it did not cover the costs of treatment.

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act, approximately 16.4 million Americans have gained health insurance coverage. And insurance companies are now required to provide treatment for substance abuse disorders and cover it just as they would cover treatment for any other chronic disease.

But we still need to understand where barriers to treatment remain, and we should work on making sure those who want to access treatment are able to do so.

I also want to hear from all of our witnesses today about how Medicaid expansion – or in Missouri’s case, a failure to expand Medicaid – has had an impact on treatment for substance abuse disorders. I know Massachusetts and Colorado both signed Medicaid expansion into law in 2013, and Indiana expanded Medicaid earlier this year.

I’m interested to hear from all three of your states about how Medicaid expansion has improved access to behavioral health services. And I want to hear from Missouri how Medicaid expansion could help those seeking access to behavioral health services and what challenges you face by not expanding the program.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, and thank you to all our witnesses for sharing your insight today.

I yield my remaining time to Rep. Kennedy.