

February 16, 2018

Dear Senator Hatch and Senator Wyden:

We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to your request for recommendations to respond to the opioid epidemic.

Opioid use has become a public health crisis over the last two decades in America with the advent of the easy availability of prescription opioids. Comparing two community samples, one that was in 1st grade in 1981 and one that was in first grade in 1993 makes this point clear. The 1981 urban sample from 19 elementary schools in Seattle Public Schools reported 3% lifetime prevalence of opioid use at age 21, primarily heroin. In 1993, a suburban sample north of Seattle from 10 elementary schools reported 35% lifetime prevalence of opioid use at age 20, primarily prescription opioids.

Opioid users are multiple drug users. They are not specialists. Negative consequences including death are produced by the use of multiple drugs often in combination. For example, at age 20 in the suburban sample described above, frequent prescription opioid users were all using alcohol, almost all were using tobacco and marijuana, two thirds were using cocaine, ecstasy, and amphetamines, and almost 20% also used heroin.

The key to reducing the opioid epidemic, is drug abuse prevention.

- Substance misuse causes harm in childhood and adolescence.
- Substance misuse established in adolescence causes harm into adulthood.
- Preventing substance misuse during childhood and adolescence can reduce mortality and morbidity over the life course.
- Treatment and life-saving naloxone will not prevent new uptake of opioids, allowing the cycle of drug abuse and wasted lives to continue.

As summarized in the recent report from the Surgeon General (2016), Facing Addiction in America, over the past 40 years prevention science research has discovered effective prevention programs and policies. These discoveries include the root causes of substance abuse often called risk and protective factors. Through federal investments in testing prevention programs and policies that seek to reduce risk and enhance protection, over 60 effective prevention programs and policies exist. All of these prevention interventions have reduced drug misuse and some, in long term follow-up have dramatically reduced opioid misuse by 2-3 fold compared to those who did not get the preventive intervention. **The problem is not knowing how to prevent substance abuse, it is mounting the political will in communities to adopt effective prevention programs matched to local community needs.**

Communities are an effective organizing force for bringing effective policies and programs to scale to improve the public health and reduce opioid misuse. Multiple effective community prevention strategies are detailed in the Surgeon General's report. These approaches build multisector community coalitions, assess young people's exposure to risk and protection, prioritize elevated risk and depressed protective factors for intervention and match these priorities to effective prevention programs and policies that address these priorities.

Prevention needs to be an important part of America's response to the opioid epidemic. Effective prevention of opioid misuse is within our reach.

- Preventing all types of substance use uptake is the best way to reduce opioid misuse.
- Increase investment in prevention programs and policies proven to work to reduce opioid use. Unless more is invested in preventing opioid misuse in the first place, we will never get ahead of this epidemic. See attached figure from ONDCP.
- Combine effective prevention interventions to prevent opioid misuse.
- Community approaches can be effective in scaling effective prevention interventions.

Community coalitions across America are mobilizing to fight the opioid epidemic, both through effective intervention like the use of naloxone to prevent overdose deaths and through effective prevention of misuse of opioids in the first place.

Communities across Utah, Oregon and the US have learned that they can significantly reduce drug misuse among adolescents and young adults by using the advances of prevention science to guide their efforts. In Utah today, the Payson Communities That Care coalition held a press event to stimulate community engagement in the opioid misuse prevention strategy, Use Only as Directed, in Utah County. The Bonneville Communities That Care coalition is grounding its opioid misuse prevention work by training middle school teachers to use the tested and proven effective Botvin Life Skills Training Program in all the middle schools in the Weber School District. That program provided in middle school has been proven to prevent opioid misuse through high school. The Iron County Communities that Care coalition, Panguitch Communities That Care Coalition, and Beaver Communities That Care Coalition all are engaged in opioid prevention actions. Look to these initiatives within Utah for the keys to the successful prevention of opioid misuse. All these communities are using the scientifically tested operating system for community wide prevention of drug abuse, Communities That Care. Tools and assistance for implementing Communities That Care are provided nationally through the University of Washington's Center for Communities That Care.

Communities that Care has been tested in a randomized controlled trials and found to have sustained effects in preventing the initiation of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use as well as delinquent and violent behavior. The prevention of initiation of these gateway drugs reduces the likelihood of opioid misuse as do the preventive interventions like Strengthening Families 10 to 14 implemented in communities through use of the CTC operating system.

We recommend that you ensure that at least 20% of the \$6 billion to be invested in controlling the opioid misuse epidemic over the next two years be invested in building the capacity of local community coalitions to choose and implement effective preventive interventions using tested and effective operating systems such as Communities That Care and PROSPER.

Sincerely,



J. David Hawkins PhD

Emeritus Endowed Professor of Prevention

Social Development Research Group
School of Social Work
University of Washington



Richard F. Catalano, Ph.D.

Bartley Dobb Professor for the Study and Prevention of Violence
Past President, Society for Prevention Research

