


Prescription Opioid Use in Alabama and How the State is Addressing the Growing Problem

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Drug-related deaths have more than doubled since the early 1980s. There are more deaths, illnesses, and disabilities from drug use/misuse than from any other preventable health condition. Today, one in four deaths is attributable to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use.

Opioids

Opioids are drugs that relieve pain. They reduce the intensity of pain signals reaching the brain and affect those brain areas controlling emotion, which diminishes the effects of a painful stimulus.



Prescription Drug Abuse/Misuse

- ✓ Intentional use of a medication without a prescription
- ✓ Use in a way other than prescribed and/or prescribed amount
- ✓ Use for the experience or feeling it causes



The nation is currently experiencing a deadly surge in addiction to prescription painkillers and other opioids.

- Although many types of prescription drugs are abused, there is currently a growing, deadly epidemic of prescription painkiller misuse. Nearly three out of four prescription drug overdoses are caused by prescription painkillers—also called opioid pain relievers.¹
- As a less expensive but more potent alternative to prescription painkillers, heroin is making a deadly comeback across the nation.²

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Policy Impact: Prescription Painkiller Overdoses. <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief/>

2. AL.com. Heroin is Back. Clay Morris, Alabama DEA; http://blog.al.com/breaking/2014/04/heroin_is_back.html

Alabama has not escaped the impact of the current opioid drug use epidemic...

- 4.71% of Alabama's population above the age of 17, over 175,000 individuals, are estimated to have used pain relievers for nonmedical purposes in the past year.
- Nearly 30,000 Alabamians, over the age of 17, are estimated to be dependent upon heroin and prescription painkillers.
- For the first time ever in 2015, admissions for opioid use disorders exceeded those for alcohol use disorders.



Alabama ranks #1 as highest painkiller prescribing state in the Nation

Prescription Drug Misuse in Alabama

- Nonmedical use of painkillers in Alabama exceeded the national average across all age categories, according to the most recent edition of the National Household Survey on Drug use and Health
- Alabama is one of the highest opioid users in the world, in that the United States has only about 5% of the population but uses about 80% of all the opioid drugs.
- Prescription drug overdose deaths in Jefferson County increased from 14 in 2012 to 74 in 2015, largely due to a significant increase in fentanyl deaths.

Heroin Deaths On The Rise in Alabama

Heroin was the cause of death of 12 people in Jefferson County in 2010. This number increased to 97 individuals in 2015

Jefferson County Medical Examiners 2015 Annual Report.



Addiction to and abuse of opioids have risen exponentially in recent years, taking a heartbreaking toll on individuals and their families, while straining law enforcement and treatment programs. More people die every day from drug overdoses than from traffic crashes, and the majority of drug overdose deaths are caused by prescription opioids and heroin.





EPIDEMIC

A rapid spread or increase in the occurrence of something.

Alabama's Opioid Epidemic:

- Former Alabama State Health Officer Don Williamson: *Abuse of prescription drugs is surging at an alarming rate. Alabama ranks among the top states in usage of prescription painkillers. We have seen this enormous explosion of overdose and death involving the non-medical use of prescription drugs.*

Alabama's Opioid Epidemic:

- Barry Matson, Chairman of the Alabama Drug Abuse Task Force: *Heroin is a significant problem for all of us. The amount of deaths and heroin overdoses that are coming from the abuse of heroin are alarming. Alabama will need a multi-prong approach to tackle the heroin problem- from education and prevention in our schools and communities to strong enforcement and prosecution as well as treatment.*

Alabama's Opioid Epidemic:

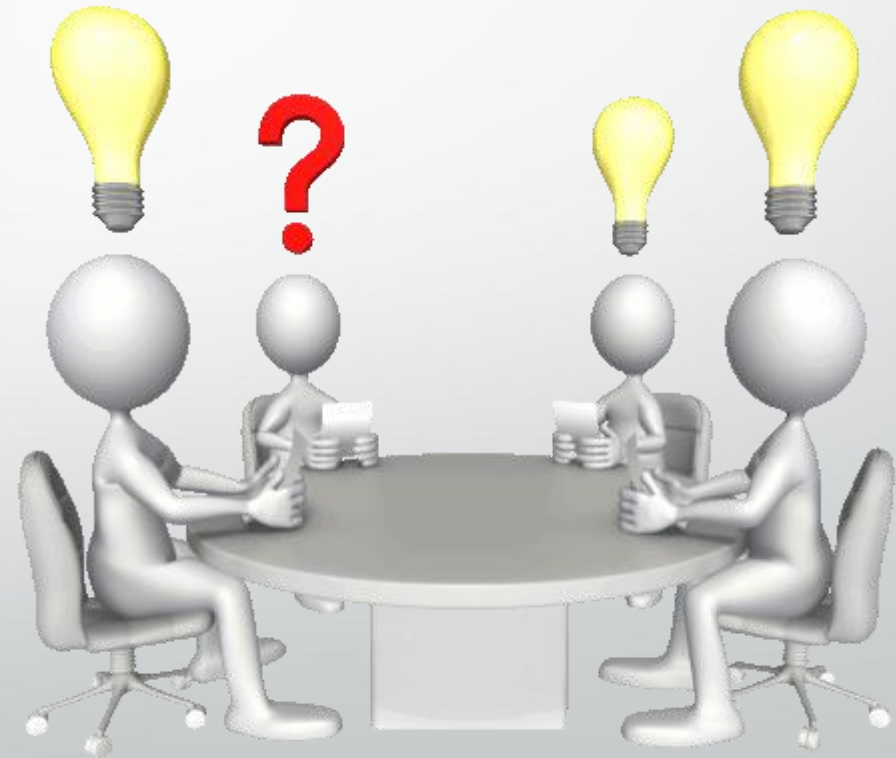
- Joyce Vance, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District: *The demographic for heroin use is: your children. This is not someone else's problem. ...We need a community-wide effort among educators, parents, medical workers to help those who are addicted, along with the work of law enforcement to attack the supply. We must have awareness of the widespread heroin epidemic and the signs of addiction so that treatment can be obtained before an overdose occurs.*²⁰

What's Driving this Epidemic?



Potential Driving Factors

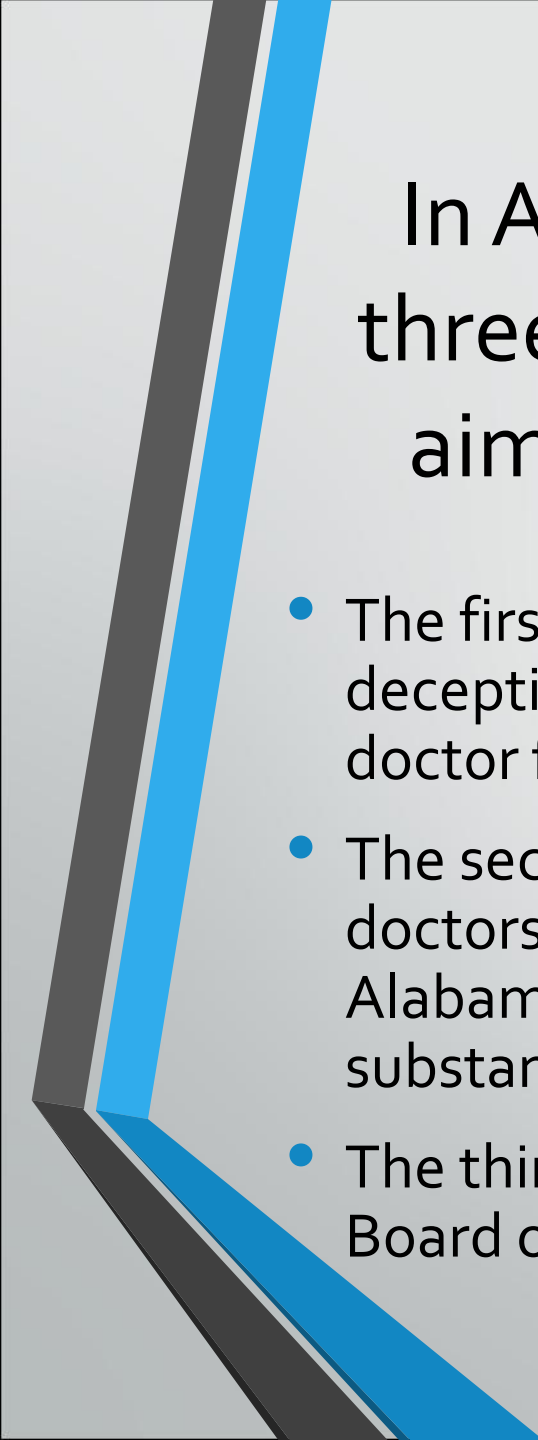
- ✓ Health of Alabamians
- ✓ Mental Wellness
- ✓ Marketing
- ✓ Access
- ✓ Legal
- ✓ Lack of Knowledge



The State's Response:

In 2013 Gov. Robert Bentley established a Prescription Drug Abuse Policy Academy to combat the problem in the state.





In August 2013, Governor Bentley signed into law three bills passed by the Alabama State Legislature aimed at reducing prescription painkiller misuse.

- The first bill makes it a Class A misdemeanor to get a prescription by deceptively concealing from a doctor a similar prescription from another doctor for the same period.
- The second bill modified Alabama's Prescription Drug Registry to allow doctors to designate two employees to access the database and gave the Alabama Medicaid Agency access to the database to monitor controlled substance use by Medicaid recipients.
- The third bill requires pain management clinics to register with the Alabama Board of Medical Examiners.

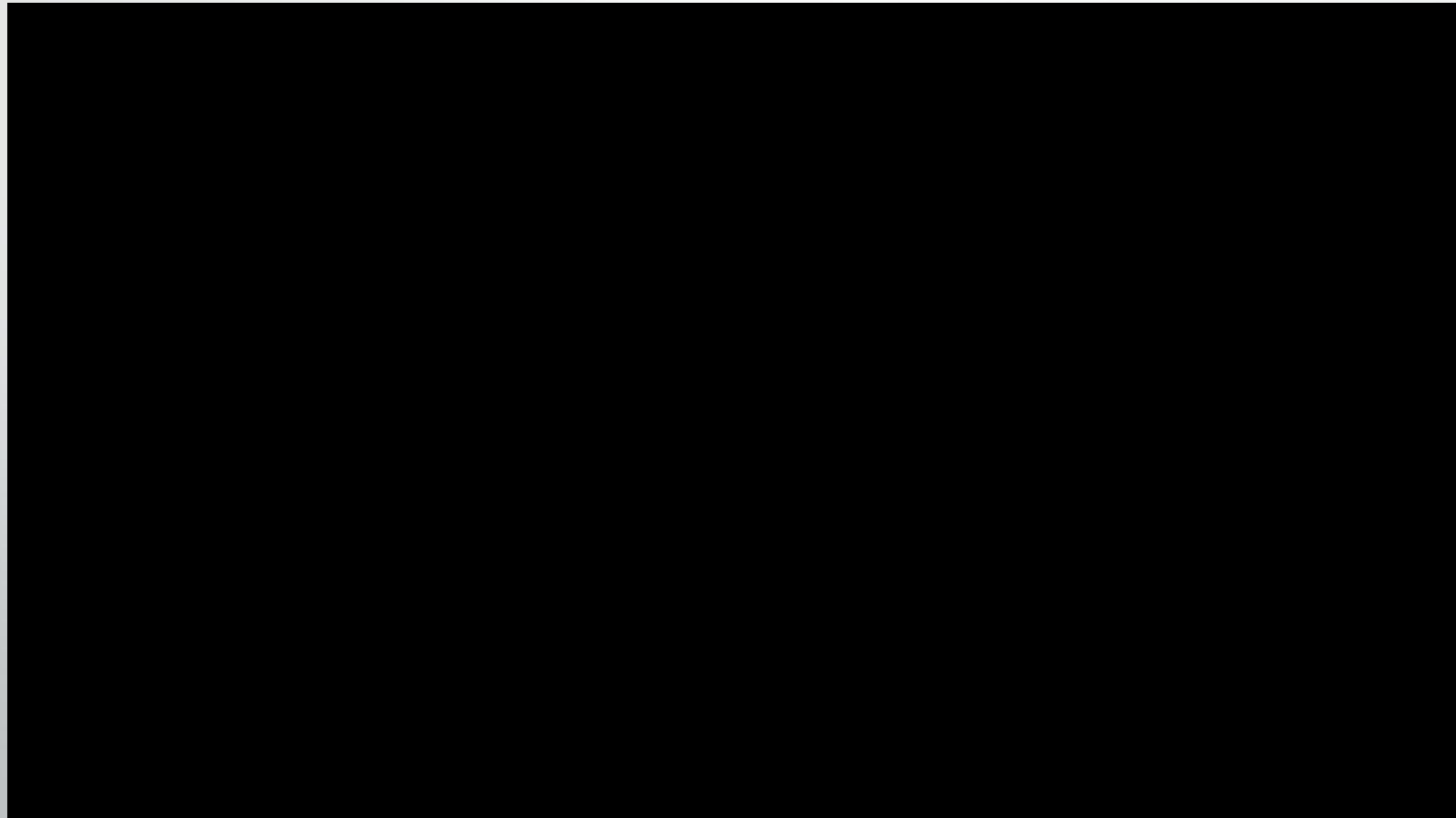
The State's Response:

In 2015 Gov. Robert Bentley executed an Executive Order to establish the Alabama Health Care Improvement Task Force

- The Task Force has strongly advocated for:
 - ✓ Changes in the state's Chemical Endangerment Law
 - ✓ Additional funding for treatment and prevention of substance use disorders
 - ✓ Mandatory Prescription Drug Monitoring Program checks by opioid prescribing physicians

The State's Response:

The Alabama Drug Abuse Task Force launched the Zero Addiction Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Campaign in June 2015:



The State's Response:

- **Governor Bentley** joined forty-five other governors to sign the [Compact to Fight Opioid Addiction](#) in July 2016.
- By signing the compact, governors are agreeing to redouble their efforts to fight the opioid epidemic with new steps to reduce inappropriate prescribing, change the nation's understanding of opioids and addiction and ensure a pathway to recovery for individuals suffering from addiction.

The State's Response

- **Alabama Department of Mental Health:** The Alabama Department of Mental Health is finalizing development of a pilot to improve access to medication assisted treatment for individuals who have opioid use disorders. The pilot is designed to support the efforts of the Pills to Needles Collaborative in addressing the significant upsurge of heroin and fentanyl use, overdose, and death in Jefferson County.



The State's Response

Alabama was selected in August 2016 to participate in the NGA Learning Lab on Heroin and Fentanyl

Areas of Focus:

- Collaboration and Integration
- Data
- Rescue
- Treatment and Recovery
- Prevention

What Can You Do ?

- Learn as much as you can about this problem
- Get involved
- Help to destroy stigma
- Screen for addiction problems
- Refer to treatment



