$1.5B to Combat Opioid and Overdose Epidemics in New York State

The funding, which also supports harm reduction, arrives from the NY attorney general's settlements with opioid manufacturers.

October 14, 2021 By Trent Straube

Efforts to battle the opioid crisis in New York state just got a nearly $1.5 billion boost. The funding arrives thanks to settlements from lawsuits filed by New York State Attorney General Letitia James against pharmaceutical companies that manufacture and distribute opioids. To deliver money to cities and promote the funding, James embarked on a HealNY tour, during which she will make stops in dozens of counties impacted by the opioid epidemic.

Because the opioid crisis is linked to injection drug use, it also fuels the transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, which can be spread through shared needles.

Similarly, fatal overdoses have spiked due the opioid epidemic. In fact, over 94,000 people died of drug overdoses in 2020 in the United States, an increase of 30.9% from 2019.

.@NewYorkStateAG Letitia James is at @AlbanyMed this afternoon as part of her 'HealNY' tour announcing opioid settlement funding for local communities.

Lotta Capitol reporters here today. Must be tons of interest in opioids ???????? pic.twitter.com/Irv5PhTpmC

— Bethany Bump (@bethanybump) October 5, 2021

"The funds we're infusing into New York…will be used toward combating this epidemic with

investments in prevention, treatment and recovery," James said in a press release from her office. "While no amount of money will ever compensate for the millions of addictions, the hundreds of thousands of deaths or the countless families torn apart by opioids, this money will be vital in preventing future devastation."

Every region and county will receive funding "that will help turn the tide on the opioid crisis," she added.

Voices of Community Activists & Leaders (VOCAL-NY)—an advocacy group that fights HIV, the drug wars, homelessness and mass incarceration—praised the new funding to battle the opioid crisis and support harm reduction.

"The extreme overdose crisis we're in now—with over 5,100 of our loved ones dying just last year—is a result of [former Governor Andrew] Cuomo starving and underfunding harm reduction and evidence-based programs," said Jasmine Budnella, VOCAL-NY's drug policy director, in a press release from the group. "Year after year, we were told there was no money for the solutions that we've long known would save lives while overdoses continued to rise. Thanks to Attorney General James's relentless leadership, we can put that fallacy to bed and finally build the harm reduction infrastructure and invest in lifesaving programs for low-income New Yorkers. And we hope to see similar leadership from Governor Hochul to continue to reverse the Cuomo administration's wrongs."

Luke Grandis, the upstate lead organizer with VOCAL-NY, spoke at one of James's HealNY press conferences. "I can say with confidence," he told the crowd, "if it were not for harm reduction and medication-assisted treatment, I would not be here to see today's progress. Attorney General James's leadership securing over a billion dollars is a critical victory, so now our state can finally fund and scale up harm reduction and evidence-based programs for Black, Brown and low-income communities that have been historically left behind."

When it was filed in 2019, James's lawsuit alleged that opioid manufacturers and distributors overmarketed the prescription drugs over the last two decades, leading to today's crisis. Parties involved in the settlements include Purdue Pharma and members of the Sackler family (which owns Purdue), Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Endo Health Solutions, Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals and numerous others. See this press release for a complete list and a rundown of how much funding the various counties across the state are receiving. And read this press release for a collection of quotes from New York City leaders and lawmakers applauding James's efforts to battle the opioid crisis.

In related hepatitis news, see "We Can't Beat Viral Hepatitis, HIV and Overdoses if We Close Syringe Services" and "International Overdose Awareness Day 2021."

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. There can be many causes, but hepatitis C virus can result in a lifelong infection, mild to serious scarring of the liver (fibrosis and cirrhosis, respectively), liver cancer, liver failure and death. The good news is that hep C is curable in most cases. To learn more, see the Hepatitis C section of Hep magazine's Hepatitis Basics, which

includes an introduction to viral hepatitis as well as other forms of hepatitis and liver disease, such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), alcoholic liver disease, autoimmune hepatitis and primary biliary cholangitis (PBC). And for a collection of articles in POZ about the intersection of hep C virus and HIV, click the hashtag #Hepatitis C.

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others. For more, see the Basics of HIV/AIDS in POZ.com, a sister publication of HepMag.com.

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