

## **What President Trump should have said about the opioid crisis**

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By Nicholas Covino

Imposing the death penalty for opioid drug dealers, cracking down on immigrants, broadcasting scary TV commercials about drugs and allocating a mere \$6 billion to combat the opioid epidemic...

That's the plan President Trump recently proposed to combat the national opioid epidemic during a visit to New Hampshire. The opioid crisis in America claims the lives of 116 people a day and continues to ravage the nation, especially in New Hampshire.

Those who are trapped in this cycle of addiction and their families who suffer deserve leadership and an effective vision.

Mandatory sentencing and an extreme focus on drug dealers is a tried and failed method. Past "War on Drugs" campaigns did little to help sufferers and they did serious damage by imprisoning thousands of poor and sick people from communities of color.

This crisis needs a dramatic increase in access to care and preventive education. A death penalty for selling drugs is ridiculous.

While it is laudable that President Trump and Congress have appropriated \$6 billion in a two-year budget deal to address the

opioid crisis, by all accounts it is a woefully insufficient amount.

Experts estimate that the allocation should be closer to \$60 billion over five years to fund: workforce development; treatment centers; preventive education; family support; and an informational network of data and services to facilitate continuous care.

Opioid addiction is caught in a Catch 22. It takes months of treatment to turn around an addiction, yet the current system only offers days or weeks and only to those who can afford it.

And, people often need to wait months to get those few days.

Spending a lot of money on great commercials showing how bad [the opioid crisis] is will be as ineffectual as those that presented the critically ill 'Marlboro Man' to discourage smoking.

Young people will turn the channel. Less than 1% of the money spent on substance use disorders is given to well-researched preventive education programs, yet every dollar spent there saves \$18.

The evidence-based solutions to the opioid crisis have been well outlined. That they are being met with the tired, punitive, xenophobic, and hostile speechmaking does not serve the families and people who are suffering.

Very little of what was offered in the president's speech in New Hampshire was informed by health care, public policy or educational research. With access to some of the best experts in the world, it is disappointing to hear about choking the supply rather than treating the people with the demand.

This is not a time for campaign rhetoric. The people who suffer from drug dependency and addiction and their families who live with chaos, anger, fear, and unspeakable loss deserve better leadership.

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