How to End the U.S. Opioid Crisis

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Thomas Frieden, MD, former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has offered a series of recommendations for ending the U.S. opioid crisis. The official “viewpoint” paper was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association and was coauthored by Andrew Kolodny, director of opioid policy research at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management in Waltham, Massachusetts.

The report warns that there are no simple solutions to ending America’s addiction epidemic but underlines 10 major responses the two public health experts believe the country must take to accelerate progress in abating the crisis.

For those unfamiliar, Frieden led the CDC from 2009 to 2017. As a political appointee, Frieden submitted his resignation to President Trump in January and is working at the global health initiative Resolve, which aims to reduce and prevent heart disease and stroke. However, as is clear from this paper, the former public health czar is still keeping a close eye on the United States’ drug addiction epidemic—which is killing more than 33,000 Americans every year.

The paper’s recommendations span everything from creating additional opioid addiction and overdose prevention initiatives to ramping up current treatment and harm reduction programs for current users. In particular, Frieden and Kolodny suggest vastly improving surveillance and reporting of opioid addiction and overdoses across the country.

The report also recommends that American doctors be even more cautious when prescribing prescription painkillers, even hinting at the possibility of limiting the amount of synthetic opioids in the nation’s drug supply by raising the price of drugs such as fentanyl in the U.S. health care marketplace.

The report also champions expanding medically assisted treatment options such as methadone and buprenorphine, as well as syringe exchange programs for reducing the spread of diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C virus. Frieden and Kolodny also recommended that the Food and Drug Administration accelerate its efforts to help drug manufacturers pursue the approval of an over-the-counter naloxone product to help reverse drug overdoses as they happen.

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