



# Treating Florida's Opioid Epidemic Now Costs Over \$1 Billion a Year

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The cost of Florida's heroin epidemic costs state hospitals more than \$1 billion a year in charges related to hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, overdose prevention, bacterial infections and care for babies born addicted to opioids, [the Palm Beach Post reports](#). That amounts to nearly \$4.1 million a day spent on addiction, drug abuse and its long-term effects.

To determine these numbers, reporters at the Post analyzed billings from 302 Florida hospitals, encompassing 58 million Florida Agency for Health Care Administration hospital diagnostic and billing records and covering all 67 counties in the state. Hospital cost figures were tabulated for all opioid-related overdoses (including prescription drugs, heroin and fentanyl), the cost of care for opioid-addicted babies and complications of intravenous drug use, including hepatitis C and bacterial infections.

Investigators noted that Florida's heroin epidemic spans rich and poor communities across the state—with both emergency and specialty hospitals affected—and largely debunks ideas that the surge in addiction and deaths is only a South Florida problem. The study also found that over a study period of six years, Florida taxpayers footed up to \$3.9 billion of the \$5.7 billion bill associated with opioid addiction through programs such as Medicaid and Medicare.

In the first nine months of 2015, heroin and opioid overdoses alone reached an average cost of \$641,000 a day, increasing 171 percent from five years prior. The cost to emergency rescue departments for naloxone (a.k.a. Narcan), a drug that acts as an antidote for opiate addiction in Florida has also tripled since last year, rising from \$55,000 in 2014 to \$183,000 through September of 2016. Cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which occurs when a baby is born addicted to opioids, have grown nearly 86 percent since 2010 in Florida, costing state hospitals \$967 million over the last five years.

For hepatitis C patients who admitted to using opiates, researchers noted that hospital charges increased \$731,000 a day between 2010 and late 2015. Hospital charges not picked up in the Post's analysis included an additional \$2.4 billion in hepatitis C treatment during the first nine months of 2015—an \$854 million increase from the same time period in 2010.

The report also notes that Florida's capital, Tallahassee, has yet to release any total statewide costs of its own or to declare a state of emergency regarding the opioid crisis.

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