

Behavioral & Social Sciences Research

Contributions to the NIH Response to the Opioid Crisis

Opioid and Pain Crises in America

The misuse and addiction to opioids, including prescription pain relievers, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and heroin has become a serious national health crisis (NIDA 2019). More than 130 people die every day from an opioid-related drug overdose (HHS 2019).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the misuse of opioids costs \$78.5 billion a year in healthcare costs, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement (NIDA 2019).

NIH Response: Trans-Agency Efforts

NIH is involved in several trans-NIH and trans-Agency efforts to address the opioid and chronic pain crises. Behavioral and social sciences are also integrated into many of these efforts. These include the NIH Pain Consortium, training activities such as the NIDA Centers of Excellence in Pain Education (CoPEs) and the NIH-DoD-VA Pain Management Collaboratory. Behavioral and Social Sciences are also integrated into the major trans-agency effort to stem the opioid and pain crises in America, HEAL (Helping to End Addiction Long-term) Initiative ([link](#)). Building on extensive, well-established research and consultation with stakeholders, the HEAL Initiative has identified 26 research priorities to provide rapid and sustainable solutions to the opioid crisis. In fiscal year 2019, NIH funded 945 million in research to tackle the national opioid crisis through the HEAL initiative ([link](#)). For more information about HEAL, please visit ([link](#)).

Behavioral and Social Sciences Contributions to the Trans-NIH Response to the Opioid and Pain Crises

In March 2018, the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) led a meeting in collaboration with other NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs) to identify and discuss the social and behavioral considerations that could help frame research priorities to address the opioid crisis. This meeting brought together representatives from multiple disciplines that included: public health, primary care, emergency departments, dentistry, basic science, the justice system, and economics. The meeting agenda ([link](#)) and both the executive and full summaries of the meeting are available online ([link](#)).

A trans-NIH strategic planning committee ([link](#)) was formed after this meeting to integrate behavioral and social sciences research into relevant HEAL initiatives and other trans-NIH research activities involving opioids through a variety of avenues including: funding announcements ([link to section on fact sheet](#)), publications ([link](#)), meetings and other events ([link](#)), and the development of resources for the community ([link](#)). Additional information on these activities are detailed in the next sections:



With our partners, the NIH will take an “all hands on deck” approach to developing and delivering the scientific tools that will help end this crisis and prevent it from reemerging in the future.

—Drs. Francis Collins and Nora Volkow (ref)

Funding Opportunity Announcements

In response to these crises, the NIH has developed and supported multiple funding opportunity announcements (FOAs) ([link here](#)) several of which are related to behavioral or social sciences research.

From 2017 to the first half of 2019, NIH Institutes, Centers and Offices (ICOs) released over 80 FOAs in response to these crises. These funding opportunities focus on support for research topics such as pain management, strategies to prevent and treat opioid addictions and implementation research.

A list of HEAL funded projects is available ([link](#)). This list is searchable by keywords (such as 'behavior') and other parameters to identify projects related to behavioral and social sciences research.

Publications

NIH supported research has resulted in over 50 research articles across at least 34 different journals related to the opioid crisis.

Several of these research articles have been featured as research spotlights [[link](#)] by the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research.

Resources

Across the NIH, at least three ICs and three offices have created 14 different resources related to the opioid crisis. These resources, such as fact sheets, training tools and reports, are used by medical providers, first responders and researchers, just to name a few ([link](#)).

Activities and Events

Since 2017, the NIH and its ICs have sponsored over 30 events, meetings, and workshops related to the prescription of opioids, opioid misuse and the opioid and pain crises.

Several of the activities have included perspectives and research expertise from the behavioral and social sciences and to date, three events have specifically focused on behavioral and social science research.

A list of upcoming opioid-related events is available [here](#) ([link](#)).



Contact Information

- For more information about behavioral and social science research and the opioid crisis, visit the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research's Opioid Crisis webpage.
- For more information about the OBSSR, please visit the OBSSR website.
- To contact the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research, please email OBSSRnews@mail.nih.gov or call 301-402-1146.