

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

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National

[Don't forget the opioid epidemic as we battle COVID-19 pandemic](#)

USA Today

The United States passed grim milestone after grim milestone over the course of the coronavirus pandemic. People were forced to live in the shadows, exist in isolation, and were oftentimes driven to the brink of despair.

As a result, our nation passed a different, albeit equally heartbreaking milestone: a [record number](#) of Americans dying as a result of a drug overdose.

Between April 2020 and April 2021, drugs – mostly synthetic opioids such as fentanyl – took the lives of more than [100,000 of our sons and daughters](#), loved ones and neighbors, community members and friends. America's other epidemic – our addiction epidemic – is not confined to a particular subset of our population. No, the plague of drug overdose deaths does not discriminate.

National

[Will the Opioid Settlement Money Actually Help People Who Need It?](#)

The New Republic

Ultimately, local governments will decide what kind of institutions and programs might have a meaningful impact on the crisis, forming an array of advisory boards and vetting processes to determine what justice looks like in this case. In anticipation of this decision-making process, [harm-reduction advocates](#) have begun to lobby for their preferred interventions, asking state governments to fund Narcan programs and medication-assisted treatment. But as one legal expert told Stat News recently, “there is always room in these things for states to perhaps wriggle out of what the original intent was.” In the coming months, these concessions and loopholes will likely become clearer.

There is some reason to be concerned with how opioid settlement money will be spent, if only because of the historical stigma against people struggling with addiction and politicized attitudes toward public health measures like [safe injection sites](#). While attitudes [have been shifting](#) slowly, many states are intensely resistant to [harm-reduction](#) strategies, balking at the idea of needle exchanges. Last year, Atlantic City

[voted to close](#) the largest such program in the state. In [Louisiana](#), lawmakers introduced a bill to use their settlement money for drug court; Alabama announced it would take the \$9 million from McKinsey & Company – which was found to have helped [“turbocharge” opioid sales](#) by consulting for drug companies like Purdue – and use it to fund the district attorney’s office, as well as the state’s forensic science department, to “reduce backlogs resulting from Alabama’s unprecedented volume of opioid-related cases.”

Oklahoma

[Unintended consequence of SQ780 may impact access to drug treatment courts](#)

KOSU

The stigmatization, [Aila Hoss, attorney and professor at the University of Tulsa who specializes in health law] said, also creates major obstacles for more progressive drug policy, such as medication-assisted treatment and monitored use at safe consumption sites. [Jari Askins, state administrative director of courts and former lieutenant governor] said while she sees how medication assistance can be “extremely appropriate” for “very, very high risk, highly addicted” people, Oklahoma lacks resources to provide sufficient in-patient programs. The inability to address severe substance abuse disorder, Hoss said, is a problem.

“How do we create safe spaces for people who use drugs who may never make it to recovery, nor want to get to that point of recovery?” Hoss said. “[Are] there safe consumption sites, harm reduction strategies? And so this is where you get into the pushback of enabling the drug use.”