

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

July 26, 2021



National

[Drug Distributors and J.&J. Reach \\$26 Billion Deal to End Opioid Lawsuits](#)

New York Times

After nearly two years of wrangling, the country's three major drug distributors and a pharmaceutical giant have reached a \$26 billion deal with states that would release some of the biggest companies in the industry from all civil liability in the opioid epidemic, a decades-long public health crisis that has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans.

The agreement, announced Wednesday afternoon by a bipartisan group of state attorneys general, lays the framework for billions of dollars to begin flowing into communities across the country for addiction treatment, prevention services, and other steep expenses from the epidemic.

If the agreement is finalized, thousands of local governments as well as states would drop lawsuits against the companies and also pledge not to bring any future action....

Wednesday's agreement leaves thousands of other lawsuits against many other pharmaceutical defendants still unresolved, including manufacturers, drugstore chains and smaller distributors. Most of those companies are working on negotiating their own deals, which could potentially bring even more money to states, cities, counties and tribes. Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin and its owners, members of the billionaire Sackler family, are negotiating a settlement of at least \$4.5 billion with plaintiffs as part of a bankruptcy restructuring.

National

[Experts: Spend opioid settlement funds on fighting opioids](#)

Associated Press

As a \$26 billion settlement over the toll of opioids looms, some public health experts are citing the 1998 agreement with tobacco companies as a cautionary tale of runaway government spending and missed opportunities for saving more lives.

Mere fractions of the \$200 billion-plus tobacco settlement have gone toward preventing smoking and helping people quit in many states. Instead, much of the money has helped to balance state budgets, lay fiber-optic cable, and repair roads.

And while the settlement was a success in many ways — smoking rates have dropped significantly — cigarettes are still blamed for [more than 480,000 American deaths a year](#).

“We saw a lot of those dollars being spent in ways that didn’t help the population that had been harmed by tobacco,” said Bradley D. Stein, director of the RAND Corporation’s Opioid Policy Center. “And I think it’s critical that the opioid settlement dollars are spent wisely.”

National

[How the opioids settlement will impact communities affected by addiction](#)

PBS Newshour

[Connecticut Attorney General] William Tong:

So, by its very terms, this very large settlement will go towards abatement.

So, this \$26 billion deal represents the second largest cash settlement in history of any litigation in American history, exceeded only by the big tobacco settlement over 20 years ago. And we wanted to make sure that that money goes directly to treatment, prevention, addiction science, victims and their families, and helping people through the long road to recovery.

So, by its terms, it directs that money to treatment and prevention, and it makes sure that that money gets to not just states... we have made [a] provision in this agreement for cities and towns and municipalities that are on the front lines of this battle.

Massachusetts

[Study: Wraparound services boost outcomes for drug court clients](#)

University of Massachusetts Medical School

An evidence-based wraparound service model that reduces barriers to care was shown to enhance drug treatment courts’ effectiveness in improving criminal justice and behavioral health outcomes among participants with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, according to a pilot study led by UMass Medical School researchers.

The study by UMass Medical School authors Paige M. Shaffer, MPH, instructor in psychiatry; Camilo Posada Rodriguez, clinical research assistant; Ayorkor Gaba, PsyD, assistant professor of psychiatry; Jennifer Harter, Ph.D., senior project director; and David Smelson, PsyD, professor of psychiatry; with collaborators from Boston University School of Social Work and Massachusetts Executive Office of the Trial Court, was published in April in International Journal of Law and Psychiatry.

Researchers looked at six-month behavioral [health](#) and criminal justice outcomes among a hard-to-engage sample of 79 participants in drug treatment courts in Quincy and Chelsea. All participants had co-occurring [mental health](#) and [substance use disorders](#). They received a wraparound treatment model, developed by Dr. Smelson and colleagues at UMass Medical School, called MISSION-CJ (Maintaining Independence and Sobriety through Systems Integration, Outreach and Networking-Criminal Justice). Sixty-five participants completed the six-month follow-up.

Drug treatment courts are an alternative to incarceration, designed to leverage legal sanctions in exchange for mandatory and [court](#)-ordered addiction treatment.