

34th National Black Nurses Day on Capitol Hill

Theme: Health Equity, Nursing Resilience & Innovations: NBNA's New Call to Action

America's Mental Health Crisis and Resilience

The National Black Nurses Association supports comprehensive efforts to reduce suicide and opioid addiction and its devastating effects. NBNA calls on the 117th Congress to address suicide and opioid addiction that affects people of all ages and races in the United States. Suicide and opioid addiction disproportionately impact Black communities. Between 2018 and 2019, suicide rates decreased 2.4% among non-Hispanic white persons.⁶ During the same time period, suicide increased 2.5% among non-Hispanic Black people.⁶ Throughout 2018 to 2019, the opioid death rate among Black people increased by 38%.⁵

Background

Multifaceted and comprehensive measures are sorely needed to reverse the following trends in suicide and opioid addiction in the United States:

- Suicide is among the leading causes of death in the United States.¹
- Known risk factors of opioid misuse and addiction include but are not limited to²:
 - Poverty
 - Unemployment
 - Family history of substance abuse
 - Personal history of substance abuse
 - Young age
 - History of criminal activity or legal problems including DUIs
 - Regular contact with high-risk people or high-risk environments
- Non-Hispanic White individuals were disproportionately affected in the wave of prescription opioid deaths at the turn of the century. However, recent increases in deaths for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic individuals have been driven by heroin and fentanyl use.³
- In the U.S., suicide rates are increasing, overdoses are increasing, and life expectancy is decreasing—“deaths of despair”, they are often called.⁴
- While there are many tools for preventing and treating opioid overdoses, they are not always deployed in communities that need them.⁵

Recommendations to Legislators

- NBNA encourages more legislation that provides easier access to mental health and opioid addiction resources in underserved populations.
- NBNA encourages support of **H.R.1368 – “Mental Health Justice Act of 2021”**. This bill creates a grant program for states and local governments to train and dispatch mental health professionals to respond, instead of law enforcement officers, to emergencies that involve people with behavioral health needs.
- NBNA encourages support of **H.R.2955 – “Suicide Prevention Act”**. This bill establishes two grant programs to prevent self-harm and suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention must award grants to state, local, and tribal health departments to expand surveillance of self-harm, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration must award grants to hospital emergency departments for programs to prevent suicide attempts among patients after discharge.

References

1. Suicide. (2021). Retrieved from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide#part_2556
2. How Opioid Addiction Occurs. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/in-depth/how-opioid-addiction-occurs/art-20360372>
3. Disparities in Opioid Overdose Death Trends by Race/Ethnicity, 2018–2019, From the HEALing Communities Study. American Journal of Public Health 111, 1851–1854. (2021) Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306431>
4. Gold, Mark. (2020). Suicide might be a root cause of more opioid overdoses than we thought. Retrieved from <https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/suicide-might-be-a-root-cause-of-more-opioid-overdoses-than-we-thought>
5. Opioid overdose deaths rise among Black Americans. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/opioid-overdose-deaths-rise-among-black-americans>
6. Disparities in Suicide. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html>