

Luján pushes for \$1 billion to combat opioid epidemic

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Members from communities that have been hardest hit by the growing opioid crisis joined together today to introduce legislation calling for more than \$1 billion in funding to combat the epidemic.

Led by Representatives Ben Ray Luján (NM-3), Elijah E. Cummings (MD-7), Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40), Joe Kennedy III (MA-4), Derek Kilmer (WA-6), and Anne McLane Kuster (NH-2), the Opioid and Heroin Abuse Crisis Investment Act has the support of 90 House Democrats and reflects President Obama’s budget request for much-needed resources to increase treatment programs that will help address the drug crisis.

In 2014, 47,055 people died from drug overdose, with opioid overdose accounting for 28,000 deaths, an increase of 200 percent since 2000. With 78 people dying from overdoses of heroin and prescription opioids per day—and deaths from the opioid epidemic surpassing the number of Americans killed in motor vehicle accidents each year—more resources are needed for prevention, treatment, and recovery.

“The drug crisis is tearing apart the fabric of communities in New Mexico and across the country,” Luján said. “While there are many dedicated individuals who are working as hard as they can to help our friends and neighbors who are struggling with drug abuse, it is painfully clear that the only way we can make significant progress is by putting in the resources that will make treatment and prevention more accessible and affordable. Right now, too many people who want help and need help simply cannot get it. This legislation, with a commitment to provide robust funding, represents a much-needed step forward that will save lives.”

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“Growing up in Baltimore, I saw the destructive nature of opioid and heroin addiction, which destroys lives and tears apart families and communities. We can no longer afford to ignore this public health and safety crisis,” Congressman Elijah E. Cummings said. “While I fully support the package of opioid bills moving through the House of Representatives as a first step, it will take actual funding to attack this crisis—funding that these bills unfortunately do not provide. The bill we introduced today will give our partners on the front lines the funding they need to fight this epidemic by supporting treatment and recovery, as well as programs to monitor and disrupt the flow of opioids into our communities.”

“When I worked for nonprofit agencies committed to addressing substance abuse, I saw how addiction devastates families,” said Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard. “If America is serious about fighting the opioid crisis, if American families are serious about saving the lives of our friends, neighbors, and loved ones, then we must make the necessary robust investments in effective treatment and prevention measures. That is exactly what our bill seeks to do.”

“Every single day, an average of three families in Massachusetts lose a father, mother, brother, sister or child to addiction,” said Congressman Joe Kennedy III. “Without providing the necessary funding, our response to the opioid crisis gripping communities across our country is a half-step at best. While I am encouraged by the bipartisan support for the bills passed in the House this week, any serious policies and programs need real resources behind them to be effective. I’m hopeful both sides of the aisle in both chambers of Congress can come together in the coming weeks to fully address an increasingly urgent crisis.”

“Wherever you live too many folks have felt the impact of heroin and opioid abuse,” Congressman Derek Kilmer said. “This scourge has led to overcrowded jails, overwhelmed medical professionals and emergency responders, and families who simply want to do more to help their loved ones. I’m proud to join my colleagues in introducing a bill that invests in programs and professionals that are on the ground helping those struggling with addiction and working to provide lifesaving care.”

“Across the Granite State and around the nation, far too many Americans struggling with addiction are unable to find necessary treatment options. Our law enforcement officials do not have the resources they need to fight this epidemic and get these drugs off our streets, and community stakeholders and advocates working to tackle this epidemic need our support to get their jobs done. That’s why I’m proud to support this bill, which will provide over \$1 billion dollars to fight the opioid epidemic. We cannot wait to fund these efforts; far too many lives across the nation depend on it,” said Congresswoman Annie Kuster, who is the co-founder of the Bipartisan Task Force to Combat the Heroin Epidemic.

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Earlier this year, President Obama called for action to address this crisis and the need for more resources. The comprehensive Opioid and Heroin Abuse Crisis Investment Act reflects the President's plan, which calls for \$1.16 billion to combat the roots of the current epidemic by providing:

- \$930 million to support cooperative agreements with States to expand access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders;
- \$50 million to expand access to substance use treatment providers;
- \$12.5 million for DEA heroin enforcement;
- Studies of real-world medication-assisted treatment;
- Advancing safe opioid prescribing guidelines;
- Enhancement of prescription drug monitoring programs; and
- Treatment for prisoners, Second Chance Act grant program funding, and residential substance abuse treatment programs.

This legislation stands in stark contrast to House Republicans' action on the opioid crisis, which prescribes solutions but offer no support. In a week that has seen votes on bipartisan legislation to authorize drug treatment and prevention programs, House Republicans have blocked efforts to provide any additional funding to combat this epidemic. Without additional resources to support new and existing programs, too many people will continue to face challenges accessing care.

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