

Pain Parity for Washington

Preventing Opioid Use Disorder Before It Begins



Pain is one of the most common reasons people visit their doctor.

Each year, nearly 80 million Americansⁱ seek treatment to manage acute pain symptoms and opioids are often prescribed as a solution. While they can be effective, they can also pose significant health risks and increase chances of opioid dependency.ⁱⁱ

But breakthroughs in pain medication are enabling patients to have a choice in their pain management. Amidst the ongoing opioid epidemic, it is critical that patients have access to the treatments they want and need to address their pain.



Need for increased access to all pain treatment options

- Within one year of receiving an opioid medication to manage acute pain, approximately 85,000 Americans were diagnosed with an opioid use disorder.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Prescribing rates have fallen, but opioid use disorders and overdoses remain high. In 2023, Washington reported:
 - More than 2,100 opioid-overdose related emergency room visits^{iv}
 - More than 2,800 opioid overdose deaths^v
 - More than 1.6 million opioid prescriptions, 55% of which were new opioid users^{vi}
 - A naloxone dispensing rate of 0.9 per 100 persons^{vii}
- Furthermore, in Washington, opioid use disorder cost Medicaid over \$966 million in excess costs in 2022.^{viii}



Pain parity legislation for equal access to pain treatment options

Across the country, states are introducing legislation to expand access to non-opioid treatments and therapies. These policy efforts, often referred to as “pain parity” legislation, address the health insurance barriers many patients face when trying to access non-opioid treatment options. Pain parity legislation ensures patients are not disadvantaged when accessing non-opioid options by:

- Prohibiting the use of utilization controls such as prior authorization and step therapy
- Equalizing cost-sharing for the non-opioid prescription drug and the opioid prescription drug



Pain parity legislation in Washington

In Washington there is important legislation focused on pain parity to help patients and families.

S.B. 5916

State Senators Paul Harris (R-17), Mike Chapman (D-24), and Rebecca Saldaña (D-37) introduced S.B. 5916, legislation that aims to increase access to non-opioid pain treatment options by:

- Prohibiting public and private health plans from disadvantaging non-opioid pain medications that are more restrictive or less favorable to the enrollee relative to the coverage of an opioid drug for the treatment or management of pain
- Requiring the state to publish an educational pamphlet on non-opioid pain treatment alternatives

Contact your representative to let them know Washington needs pain parity and help prevent addiction before it begins.

<https://leg.wa.gov/>

Visit www.families-network.org to learn more about Take Control of Pain and the state of pain parity across the U.S.

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iii. Schoenfeld AJ, et al. An Evaluation of the Incidence of Opioid Use Disorder Among People with Acute and Chronic Pain Managed with Prescription Opioids and the Associated Economic and Societal Burden in the United States. Presented at PAINWeek 2024, Las Vegas, NV.
iv. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2025. Dose-DIS Dashboard: Nonfatal Overdose Emergency Department and Inpatient Hospitalization Discharge Data. <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/dose-dashboard-nonfatal-discharge-data.html>
v. KFF. 2023. Opioid Overdose Deaths and Opioid Overdose Deaths as a Percent of All Drug Overdose Deaths. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/state-indicator/opioid-overdose-deaths/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
vi. Washington State Department of Health. 2025. Opioid and Drug Use Data. <https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/washington-tracking-network-wtn/opioids/overdose-dashboard>
vii. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2025. Naloxone Dispensing Rate Maps. <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/naloxone-dispensing-rate-maps.html>
viii. Health Management Associates. 2025. Opioid Use Disorder in the Medicaid Fee-For-Service Program Economic Analysis. <https://www.healthmanagement.com/wp-content/uploads/Opioid-Use-Disorder-Economic-Impact-on-Medicaid-Program-073125.pdf>

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