

MORE AMERICANS AWARE OF GROWING PROBLEM OF OPIOID ADDICTION

Awareness up sharply over 2016 numbers. A majority see addiction as a disease, but 4 in 10 cite lack of willpower or discipline.

CHICAGO, April 5, 2018 — A new survey by [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) reveals the number of Americans who see opioid addiction as a significant issue for their community today is up significantly over just two years ago. Forty-three percent of Americans now say the misuse of prescription drugs is a serious problem, compared with 33 percent in 2016. A majority of Americans report having experience with substance abuse of various types, and 13 percent have had a relative or close friend die from an opioid overdose.

Although 53 percent of the public sees prescription drug addiction as a disease, many regard such addiction as a behavioral failing. Forty-four percent say opioid addiction indicates a lack of willpower or discipline; 32 percent say it is caused by a character defect or bad parenting, and less than 1 in 5 Americans are willing to associate closely with a friend, colleague or neighbor who is addicted to prescription drugs. This indicates that stigma surrounding opioid addiction is an issue.

The findings are among many in a survey exploring attitudes and awareness of Americans about the opioid epidemic in particular and drug misuse in general, as well as how to address the crisis.

“In the national effort to grapple with the enormous issue of opioid addiction, it is important to know the level of awareness and understanding of Americans who find themselves in the midst of an epidemic that is claiming growing numbers of lives,” said Caitlin Oppenheimer, senior vice president of public health at NORC. “This survey provides important, and in some cases troubling, information.”

Additional findings from the survey include:

- Two-thirds of respondents say their community is not doing enough to make treatment programs accessible and affordable or to find improved methods of treating addiction.
- Sixty-four percent would like to see more effort to crack down on drug dealers.
- Fifty-seven percent of Americans have experience dealing with substance misuse ranging from taking a painkiller that wasn't prescribed to overdosing.
- Twenty-four percent say they have an addicted relative, close friend, or that they themselves are addicted to opioids.

“The number of people who recognize how serious the opioid epidemic is in this nation is growing,” said Trevor Tompson, vice president for public affairs research at NORC. “There is clearly a continuing challenge to ensure that what is learned about the crisis is grounded in fact.”



Facebook is the dominant source of information on social media about the opioid crisis. Of the 74 percent of adults who use Facebook, 41 percent say they have seen messages about opioids or about death from overdoses. Fewer users of other platforms report seeing such information.

About the Survey

The nationwide survey of 1,054 adults used AmeriSpeak, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between March 14 and 19, 2018, online and using landlines and cell phones. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points. The AmeriSpeak Panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population.

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