



February 26th, 2025

Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand's Opening Statement “Combating the Opioid Epidemic”

Chairman Scott, thank you for calling today's hearing.

There is no community in this country that has escaped the impact of the opioid crisis.

Substance use disorders are growing at an alarming rate in the United States. Broadly, 48.5 million people aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder in the past year.

While older adults tend to use substances at lower rates than other age groups, 4.6 million people aged 65 or older had a substance use disorder.

In the past year, fatal drug overdoses decreased nationally, and while the numbers vary significantly between states, we have the tools to continue reducing overdose deaths to reverse the trend in states where this isn't the case.

We know that expanding the availability and affordability of treatments and harm reduction policies like universal access to naloxone are strategies that work.

We need to take a multifaceted approach that includes law enforcement and criminal justice elements that places a larger emphasis on public health and social policies.

We cannot fully address the opioid crisis if we are not also addressing prevention and access to affordable treatment.

It's why protecting Medicaid is so critical. Medicaid is the primary payer for substance use disorder treatment and any cuts to the Medicaid program would devastate our ability to solve this crisis.

Another critical piece of the puzzle is the impact of drug use on the whole family.

More than 2.5 million children are currently being raised by grandparents, other relatives, or a close family friend, and over time, more grandparents are forced to become family caregivers because of the opioid crisis.

I co-lead the bipartisan Supporting Families Through Addiction Act, which would provide support to the families of people receiving treatment for a substance use disorder.

Congress must do a better job of tackling this crisis holistically.

I hope to work with my colleagues in the future to develop policies that take every aspect of this crisis into account, from providing necessary public safety tools to making sure those with substance use disorder have access to affordable, evidence-based treatment.

I look forward to today's hearing and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses who can speak to the opioid ecosystem and how we can truly combat the opioid crisis.