

NIH HEAL Initiative: Research Meets the Moment to Address the Opioid Public Health Crisis

What

An article published in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) highlights the results of numerous strategies through which the National Institutes of Health's Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative, is finding scientific solutions to address the nation's opioid crisis. The task is even more urgent since the COVID-19 pandemic fueled a nearly 30% increase in overdose deaths in 2020, the highest 12-month increase in decades. To date, the initiative has funded \$1.5 billion to more than 500 research projects to address opioid misuse and pain management.

NIH HEAL Initiative Director Rebecca G. Baker, Ph.D., National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Director Walter J. Koroshetz, M.D., and National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D., describe progress from the initiative's multi-pronged approach that focuses not only on innovative research strategies in both pain and addiction, but also leverages the strengths of communities to address this public health crisis. These efforts are already yielding results:

- Community-based programs such as the HEALing Communities Study have launched communication campaigns targeting stigma, delivered naloxone widely, and created real-time data dashboards to help guide community decision-making.
- Research has led to a new, non-opioid approach to treat neuropathic pain, currently granted an investigational new drug (IND) application through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and 16 INDs have been approved for existing medications to be tested to treat opioid use disorder.
- Other novel treatments are emerging, such as an oxycodone vaccine that is currently being tested in first-in-human trials.
- New research showcases several innovative devices to treat infants with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome or patients with chronic low back pain, reflected by FDA-granted "breakthrough device" status.
- Three large clinical studies are underway toward defining a standard of care for babies born dependent on opioids.

Meeting the moment, the NIH HEAL Initiative is harnessing the power of research to address a public health crisis and is releasing information rapidly. Findings and publications from initiative-funded studies are part of the HEAL data ecosystem, being built around a cloud-based computing platform that will provide access to the vast array of data generated. These and future research findings will help the millions of individuals, families, and communities affected by poorly treated pain disorders and the opioid crisis.

Article

- Baker, RG; Koroshetz, WJ; Volkow, ND. The Helping to End Addiction Long-term (HEAL) Initiative of the National Institutes of Health. *JAMA*. 2021. [https://DOI: 10.1001/jama.2021.13300](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.13300)

Who

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How

To schedule an interview with Dr. Baker, please email diana.morales@nih.gov. To schedule an interview with Dr. Koroshetz, please email NINDSPressTeam@ninds.nih.gov. To schedule an interview with Dr. Volkow, please email Media@nida.nih.gov.

About the NIH HEAL Initiative: The Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative, is an aggressive, trans-NIH effort to speed scientific solutions to stem the national opioid public health crisis. Launched in April 2018, the initiative is focused on improving prevention and treatment strategies for opioid misuse and addiction and enhancing pain management. For more information, visit: <https://heal.nih.gov>.

About the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): NIDA is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. For more information about NIDA and its programs, visit www.nida.nih.gov.

About the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS): NINDS is the nation's leading funder of research on the brain and nervous system. The mission of NINDS is to seek fundamental knowledge about the brain and nervous system and to use that knowledge to reduce the burden of neurological disease. For more information, visit www.ninds.nih.gov.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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