



## Perspectives on Opioids and Athletic Trainers

Since 1999, the number of overdose deaths related to opioids (including prescription opioid pain relievers and heroin) quadrupled in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Moreover, the number of prescriptions for opioids sold during this same time also quadrupled, despite the level of pain Americans reported remaining consistent.

In 2016, an estimated one in five patients with non-cancer pain or pain-related diagnoses is prescribed an opioid. In many cases, addiction to prescription opioids can lead to abuse of less expensive heroin. In 2014, there were 18,893 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers, and 10,574 overdose deaths related to heroin. The widespread availability and abuse of prescription opioids and heroin has been recognized as a public health crisis by both lawmakers and the public.

### Legislative and Regulatory Solutions

President Obama's Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Budget Request included a proposal for \$1.1 billion in new funding for opioid epidemic response efforts, and \$500 million to boost existing programs. On July 22, 2016, President Obama signed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (P.L. 114-198) into law. This bipartisan legislation includes numerous new programs and policy changes to address opioid abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery.

### How Athletic Trainers Can Help

Athletic trainers can play an important role in promoting safe opioid use and preventing opioid abuse. While participation in sports decreases the likelihood that a student will abuse illicit drugs, sports injuries often result in a student being prescribed a pain medication, putting student athletes at a higher risk for abusing those opioid-related medications. Below are a few suggestions on what athletic trainers can do about this important issue:

- **Increasing Athletic Trainer Presence:** Only an estimated 37% of high schools employ a full-time athletic trainer. NATA supports proposals to ensure that every high school with an athletics department has a full-time athletic trainer on staff to monitor the health of student athletes.
- **Sharing Information, Sharing Responsibility:** Athletic trainers are uniquely positioned to help with the prevention of opioid abuse and successful rehabilitation from injury amongst student athletes. If a student athlete is prescribed an opioid, the athletic trainer at his or her school should be informed so they can assist with monitoring the student's usage and recovery progress.
- **Empower Athletic Trainers to Stop Overdoses:** Opioid overdoses can be reversed when the lifesaving drug naloxone is promptly administered. NATA supports proposals to increase access to and training in administering naloxone, including amongst athletic trainers, who often are at the front line of care for athletes.

For more information, contact:

Amy Callender, Director of Government Affairs for NATA, at (972) 532-8853 or [amyc@nata.org](mailto:amyc@nata.org)

Sources: <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/prescribing.html>; <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>; <http://natajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.4085/1062-6050-50.2.03>; [http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(13\)00484-9/abstract](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(13)00484-9/abstract); <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/07/21/peds.2016-0677>