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## Pyxis Perspectives

# Connecting Fact, Statistics, Stories and Policy: An Integrated Approach Can Spur Action

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Addiction. It's a powerful word. A word that brings a flood of emotions – fear, embarrassment, anger, outrage, pity, sadness, failure, guilt, compassion. Addiction may spur a memory of a loved one, a friend, a personal reflection. Addiction also means confronting deeply rooted stigma. How do we help overcome stigma associated with addiction in particular opioid use disorder (OUD) and truly help people and communities address addiction?

**WE CAN TELL THE FACTS AND STATISTICS.** Science clearly demonstrates that addiction is a complex disease of the brain. Drugs alter the way the brain is wired making it hard for people to stop using and regain self-control.<sup>1</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2018, opioids were involved with 69.5% of drug overdoses<sup>2</sup>, and more than 128 Americans die each day from an opioid overdose.<sup>3</sup> Layer on top of the opioid crisis the current coronavirus pandemic, and early data points towards a nearly 18% increase in overdose deaths<sup>4</sup> in 2020.

**WE CAN TELL STORIES.** We can tell the story of a person dependent on opioids – how they feel, their why, and their needs. We can tell the story of a person in recovery - their journey, success, and challenges. We can tell the stories of moms, dads, sisters, brothers, spouses, and friends who lost their loved ones too early to an overdose and struggle every day to understand how they missed the signs, question how they could have helped, or what they did wrong. We can tell the story of the child who lost their parents and home.

**WE CAN CREATE POLICY.** The Trump Administration declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency freeing up resources and providing flexibility to the federal government in responding to the crisis. Congress passed the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act that included provisions aimed at increasing access to high-quality, evidence-based treatment and care, strengthening the provider workforce, among many others. Federal agencies allocated billions of dollars to state and local governments to implement a wide spectrum of programming.

**WE CAN SPUR ACTION.** Yet, we still find ourselves struggling to address the opioid crisis. Facts and statistics inform, but alone do not spur action. Stories compel sympathy and discussion, but alone do not spur action.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.odmap.org/Content/docs/news/2020/ODMAP-Report-June-2020.pdf>



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There is a will to create better policy and provide federal funding to support programs, but alone these actions will not fix the opioid crisis. So, what can we do? How do we spur action?

We harness the power of facts, statistics, stories, and policy and fuse them into a multi-pronged advocacy strategy. We create platforms to amplify these elements to demonstrate real-world impact. We talk about addiction as a disease like any other chronic disease that requires routine treatment, care, and monitoring. And we make it easy for people to access and pay for that care. As a society, we open our eyes and hearts to those who need our support and help. We move past stigma.

I am proud to work with our clients who funnel their personal experience and passion for community in bringing innovative approaches to support the OUD community. Through our integrated advocacy approaches, our clients have seen success in developing and promoting tools that truly meet the needs of the OUD community. For example, we have seen development of a critical telehealth tool pivot in real time to better align to the priorities of patients, healthcare providers, and payors. We have seen an increased interest in a new treatment when we created opportunities to amplify personal stories and the real-world impact of this treatment through trusted community validators and messengers.

We acknowledge that each of these tools is no silver bullet. But much how facts, statistics, stories, and policy alone will not address this crisis, when pulled together as a part of a bigger, more comprehensive toolbox then perhaps we will make real progress in combating the opioid crisis. Perhaps one day when we hear the word addiction, we will think hope.