

Welcome to the weekly newsletter from the Center for Addiction Research! Each newsletter includes highlights from addiction in the news topics, active funding opportunities offered by NIDA/NIAAA, and information about any new publications from CAR members. Please email Jen Rowe (roweji@ucmail.uc.edu) to change your communication preferences. Thank you.

Thank you for your interest in the Center for Addiction Research - our mission is to accelerate scientific progress in the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders and their consequences by fostering research collaborations across: 1) UC departments, colleges, and centers including Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center; 2) Local, regional, and state community and governmental partners; and 3) Other academic institutions and industry."



UC/ Regional News

Proposed Ohio Law Would Expand Medical Marijuana Use To Include New Conditions.

The AP (11/12) reported, "Eligibility for medical marijuana in Ohio would be expanded to include any condition determined by a licensed physician to need treatment, under a new bill that would further expand the state's medicinal marijuana program." The measure "expands qualifying conditions to include autism spectrum disorder, arthritis, migraines, terminal illness and treatment of any other condition whose 'symptoms may reasonably be expected to be relieved from medical marijuana' as determined by a physician."

Ohio COVID-19 telemed rules for medical pot, drug prescriptions extended through March 2022

Ohioans will be able to continue using telemedicine through March 2022 for doctor visits that involve prescribing drugs or renewing medical marijuana cards. The State Medical Board of Ohio on Wednesday delayed the scheduled expiration of COVID-19 emergency rules that allow for more liberal use of telemedicine. The rules had been scheduled to end Dec. 31. The extension...

Lives lost to overdose as opioid epidemic surges through Ohio, fueled by fentanyl

The pandemic and its planet-wide devastation continue. So it's hard to remember sometimes that other epidemics exist alongside it, cutting down lives and searing

families forever in the process. The dead should be remembered. They are still mourned by those who loved them. And a community that is somehow less without them. These are some of their names. These are some of...

'These are illnesses': Ad campaign aims to reduce stigma around addiction, mental illness

A coalition formed to educate central Ohioans about the danger of opioids is taking its message statewide with a new advertising campaign that aims to reduce stigma around addiction and mental illness. The setting for the public service announcements is the fictional gameshow "Beat the Stigma," where contestants offer common misconceptions as to what contributes to...

Eastern Kentucky man convicted after making millions in opioid addiction fraud scheme

A Pikeville man was convicted of wire and health care fraud after a federal jury ruled he made millions of dollars off a double-billing scheme that took money from opioid addiction patients and Medicaid. Eugene Sisco III made about \$10 million by telling Medicaid patients they had to pay cash for opioid addiction treatments while also billing Medicaid for the services, according to evidence...

As the opioid crisis worsens, those responsible must be held accountable

Year after year, the opioid crisis continues to devastate Ohio families and communities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released data featuring a grim statistic: fatal drug overdoses increased by 22% in Ohio in 2020. It is an astonishing figure. It would be impossible to believe if it weren't for the intimate familiarity Ohioans have with this crisis. Nearly all...

Mom who lost 2 children to addiction works to make holidays brighter for other families left behind

SANDUSKY, Ohio — A Sandusky mother who lost two children to drug addiction is finding a way to help others as she deals with the pain of her loss. She's making sure kids who've lost parents to drugs have a bright spot this Christmas season and throughout the year. Keli Clark, the founder and director of [Project Noelle](#), says she wants to bring them hope. "I think as parents, you know, our goal..."

Giant Eagle Resolves Ohio Opioid Suit During Trial

Giant Eagle, a 103-year-old company that owns a chain of supermarkets and pharmacies in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana and Maryland, agreed to settle lawsuits that accuse it of contributing to the opioid crisis in communities throughout Ohio. The financial terms of the settlement—announced Oct. 29—were not initially disclosed. Two counties in Ohio—Lake and Trumbull...

Ohio drug overdose deaths jumped 26% in a year

OHIO — The state of Ohio saw a 26.6% increase in drug overdose deaths in the 12-month period ending April 2021 compared to the 12-month period ending April 2020, the National Center for Health Statistics reported. The updated statistics come as federal officials said Wednesday that the number of drug overdose deaths climbed above 100,000 for the first time in the U.S. in a...

National News

Rep. Mace Introduces Bill To Federally Decriminalize Marijuana.

The [AP](#) (11/15, Kinnard) reports [Rep. Nancy Mace \(R-SC\)](#) “introduced legislation Monday to federally decriminalize marijuana, a measure she said would give states freer rein to pass their own laws and regulations without fear of federal reprisals.” While announcing the legislation “during a Washington news conference on Monday, Mace said a half-dozen GOP House members would be original co-sponsors of the bill, which she said would aim to regulate marijuana similarly to alcohol and prohibit its use for anyone under 21 years of age.” The bill “would decriminalize marijuana at the federal level, an impediment cited in many states that have opted not to pursue legalization on their own.” Medical cannabis “would be regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, Mace said, adding that she would propose the drug be regulated similarly to alcohol.”

[Forbes](#) (11/15, Yakowicz, 10.33M) reports “the States Reform Act proposes to remove cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act – [it’s] currently designated a Schedule I substance along with LSD and heroin.” The legislation would “allow for states to make their own rules and laws around cannabis, including banning sales and use within state borders.”

Cannabis Use May Affect Placenta, May Be Tied To Higher Levels Of Anxiety, Aggression, And Hyperactivity In Children, Research Suggests.

[CNN](#) (11/16, Hunt, 89.21M) reports research indicates that “cannabis use can affect the placenta and may be linked to higher levels of anxiety, aggression and hyperactivity in children.” The study, which included “322 mother-child pairs,” revealed that “children of mothers who used cannabis during pregnancy showed higher anxiety, aggression, hyperactivity and levels of the stress hormone cortisol, compared with children of mothers who did not use cannabis during pregnancy.” In addition, “analysis of the placental tissue, which involved sequencing RNA” demonstrated that “maternal cannabis use was associated with lower expression of immune-activating genes, including cytokines, which are involved in protecting against pathogens.” The [findings](#) were published online in PNAS.

VA Denying Calls To Expand Cannabis Research As Lawmakers Propose Medical Cannabis Research Measure.

[Becker’s Hospital Review](#) (11/10, Gonzalez, 91K) reported, “As many veterans continue to self-medicate using cannabis to ease post-traumatic stress disorder and

other war-induced health problems, the Department of Veterans Affairs has discontinued its research into the drug.” The VA has blocked “calls to expand some of its research into medical marijuana, meaning it will also continue denying cannabis recommendations to veterans.” However, “Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, and Rep. Lou Correa, D-Calif., both introduced legislation Nov. 4 that would instruct the VA to conduct research into the use of marijuana in PTSD and depression and allow VA physicians to recommend medical marijuana.” The article added, “The National Institute on Drug Abuse has testified to Congress, urging lawmakers to increase research into cannabis use given the ‘substantial evidence’ that it has the potential to treat chronic pain.”

Additional Sources. In similar coverage, [Cannabis Now](#) (11/11, Roberts) reports the House Veterans Affairs Committee last week approved the proposed VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act, “a bill that would authorize federal research into the therapeutic applications of cannabis for military veterans.”

Veterans advocate Tom Rodgers wrote for the [Great Falls \(MT\) Tribune](#) (11/10, 108K) that Sen. Jon Tester (D-MO), chairman of a key committee on veterans affairs, should support the Senate version of the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act. Rodgers said that veterans “are not alone” in their efforts to support this research, adding, “At a key bipartisan hearing in the House last year, Dr. Nora Volkow, director of National Institute on Drug Abuse testified, ‘Rigorous research is essential for understanding how the changing cannabis landscape will affect public health, for guiding evidence-based policy and to help advance therapeutics.’”

Nicotine May Play Role In Suppressing Immune System, Researchers Say.

[WALA-TV Mobile, AL](#) (11/17, 136K) reports that scientists at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute “found that nicotine, the addictive ingredient in tobacco products and cigarette substitutes, plays a novel role in immunosuppression.” The findings “highlight the health hazards of nicotine intake including an enhanced susceptibility to developing cancer.” As part of her “doctoral research project, Sirin Saranyutanon, a Ph.D. candidate in the Basic Medical Sciences Graduate Program, investigated the effect of nicotine on macrophage polarization, growth and invasion to understand its role in human physiology.”

NIDA To Fund Psilocybin Study In Smoking Cessation In First Federal Therapeutic Psilocybin Research In 50 Years.

[Rolling Stone](#) (11/11, Hartman, Margolin, 12.39M) reports, “The National Institutes of Health granted Johns Hopkins Medicine, in collaboration with University of Alabama at Birmingham and New York University, \$4 million to investigate if psilocybin – one of the primary psychoactive ingredients in psychedelic mushrooms – can help people quit smoking,” the first federal funding for therapeutic psilocybin research in 50 years. The grant study “researchers received came specifically from a pool of money allocated by NIDA – the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which

exists under the National Institutes of Health – for novel treatments for substance use.” NIDA told principal investigator Matthew Johnson, PhD, “when he was applying for the grant that they are open to funding studies on psychedelics.” Rolling Stone adds, “In a Senate budget hearing in May, former NIH director Dr. Francis Collins said NIH and the agencies that fall under it will ‘want to have a hard look’ at the promise of psychedelic compounds for mental health.”

Startup Pursuing Non-Opioid Painkiller That Indirectly Blocks NaV1.7 Ion Channel.

[FierceBiotech](#) (11/10, Liu, 4K) reported “the NaV1.7 ion channel is expressed in some neurons and plays a critical role in sensing pain, making it a popular target for scientists developing novel pain therapies.” However, “suppressing NaV1.7 head-on has proven tricky.” For that reason, “researchers at the University of Arizona are pursuing an alternate strategy: They’re blocking the sodium channel indirectly through two related proteins.” The research “team has designed a drug that disrupts the interaction between a mediator protein called CRMP2 and an enzyme, Ubc9, which is important in the activity of NaV1.7.” The university “has licensed the drug, dubbed 194, to a startup called Regulonix, which was co-founded by the study’s senior author, Rajesh Khanna, Ph.D., to develop ion channel-targeting non-opioid painkillers.” Khanna “and his team have been working with” NIH’s “National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences to optimize the compound.”

Additional Sources. [Scienmag](#) (11/10) reported “an NCATS team is primarily focusing on improving 194’s half-life – the time it takes for a drug to reduce by half in your body – and its drug-like properties.” It marks “an important step in optimizing the compound’s potential as a pain-relieving drug and advancing to the next stage, where researchers will file for Food and Drug Administration approval to begin clinical trials.” NIDA was mentioned.

Massachusetts Reports 1% Increase In Opioid-Related Overdose Death Rate In First Nine Months Of 2021.

The [Revere \(MA\) Journal](#) (11/17, 21K) reports, “Opioid-related overdose deaths in Massachusetts rose slightly in the first nine months of 2021 compared to the same time last year, according to preliminary data released today by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).” From January through September, “there were 1,613 confirmed and estimated opioid-related overdose deaths, approximately 21 more deaths than in the first nine months of 2020, or a 1 percent increase.” Furthermore, “data released earlier this year noted that Black non-Hispanic men made up the largest increase in opioid overdose death rates, a finding reinforced by today’s report.” The state is among those “with the smallest increases nationwide in all drug overdose deaths between March 2020 and March 2021, according to the latest preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).” The article mentions SAMHSA.

Florida Is The Epicenter Of The Nation's HIV And Opioid Crises. This Doctor Is Battling To Stop The Virus And Winning.

[USA Today](#) (11/15, Ruiz-Goiriena, 12.7M) reports that Dr. Hansel Tookes is on the road with “two other members of his IDEA Exchange team, the first legal syringe exchange program in Florida.” According to USA Today, “In under 20 months, Tookes’ hybrid needle exchange telehealth and HIV medication outreach program has become the most successful HIV suppression campaign in the nation.” The innovative program “offers unhoused people the option of connecting with Tookes through iPads anywhere in the city and having medicines delivered.” The National Institute on Drug Abuse awarded Tookes “\$2.3 million to bankroll a clinical trial in Miami and Tampa and the possible expansion across the state.” NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow said, “This intervention is an example of how, by taking into account the actual experiences of people with HIV and addressing their healthcare needs, we can achieve goals that otherwise seemed impossible.”

Will The DEA Reschedule Cocaine Before Marijuana? Find Out More.

[Entrepreneur Magazine](#) (11/12, Phillip, 2.81M) reported, “The Drug Enforcement Administration is working to reschedule a controlled substance that’s derived from cocaine,” which is “the type of action reform advocates want to see with cannabis.” According to the article, “the DEA is suggesting to remove the cocaine derivative from Schedule II. In addition to completely removing criminal and civil punishments associated with the drug.” The National Institute on Drug Abuse is mentioned.

Volkow Says Government Carries Responsibility In Perpetuating Drug Addiction Stigmas.

[Marijuana Moment](#) (11/11, Jaeger) reports, “The government bears some responsibility in perpetuating stigmas against drug addiction that have created barriers to treatment, the head of the nation’s top drug research agency says.” National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora Volkow – in an [op-ed](#) published by the Association of American Medical Colleges last week – “shared a personal story about the stigmatization of drug use and the negative consequences that’s had for people suffering from substance misuse disorders. Part of that stigma comes from the enforcement of punitive drug policies, including some that remain in effect, she said.” Federal “policies, including criminal justice measures, often reflect – and contribute to – stigma,” Volkow said, adding: “When we penalize people who use drugs because of an addiction, we suggest that their use is a character flaw rather than a medical condition. And when we incarcerate addicted individuals, we decrease their access to treatment and exacerbate the personal and societal consequences of their substance use.”

Overdose Deaths Reached Record High As The Pandemic Spread.

On its front page, the [New York Times](#) (11/17, Rabin, 20.6M) reports, “Americans died of drug overdoses in record numbers as the pandemic spread across the

country, federal researchers” with the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics “reported on Wednesday, the result of lost access to treatment, rising mental health problems and wider availability of dangerously potent street drugs.” During the 12-month period ending in April, provisional figures indicate that “more than 100,000 Americans died of overdoses, up almost 30 percent from the 78,000 deaths in the prior year.” National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Dr. Nora Volkow said, “These are numbers we have never seen before. ... This is a major challenge to our society.”

Additional Sources. In a front-page article, The [Washington Post](#) (11/17, A1, Keating, Bernstein, 10.52M) reports that this “is the first time that drug-related deaths have reached six figures in any 12-month period” in US history. Furthermore, “[the] new data shows there are now more overdose deaths from the illegal synthetic opioid fentanyl than there were overdose deaths from all drugs in 2016.”

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (11/17, A1, Kamp, Wernau, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports in a front-page article that CDC data indicate overdose deaths increased in 46 states as well as in Washington, DC. Recording the highest rise in the US, Vermont saw a 70% increase during the period, reporting 129 opioid-related deaths through August, up from an average of 88 deaths during the same time frame in recent years.

[NPR](#) (11/17, Mann, 3.69M) reports that Dr. Volkow said that overdoses “are driven both by fentanyl and also by methamphetamines.” According to NPR, “She predicted the surge of fatalities would continue because of the spread of more dangerous street drugs.” Volkow added, “They are among the most addictive drugs that we know of and the most lethal.”

[USA Today](#) (11/17, Alltucker, 12.7M) reports, “In a call with reporters Wednesday, Biden administration officials called on Congress to fully fund the more than \$11 billion in drug-related programs the president has requested to implement his plan.” HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said, “It’s time to face the facts that this crisis seems to be getting worse. ... It’s time to stop the stigma, stop the blame. It’s time for inclusion, solidarity, compassion, and it’s time to follow the science and the data about what works.”

[ABC News](#) (11/17, Joseph, Carrington, Salzman, 2.44M) reports Becerra said, “An American dying every five minutes – that’s game-changing.” HHS “and other government health officials outlined new initiatives aimed at combating the overdose epidemic, including expanding access to naloxone – a drug used to reverse opioid overdoses, allowing federal dollars to be used to purchase fentanyl test strips to detect the presence of fentanyl in any drug batch and increasing funding toward addiction prevention efforts.”

[Roll Call](#) (11/17, Raman, 130K) reports that Office for National Drug Control Policy Director Rahul Gupta told reporters during the call Wednesday, “This is unacceptable and requires an unprecedented response.” The article notes that the National Institutes of Health in 2019 “announced a study seeking to cut opioid deaths by 40 percent in four states within three years,” but all of those four states are currently seeing increases in deaths. Speaking on the call, Dr. Volkow said,

“Unfortunately, when we were planning these studies, we were completely unaware, we couldn’t have predicted that there would be the COVID pandemic basically taking over. ... What we have seen is that the stressors from the COVID pandemic have led to more drug abuse, to difficulty in accessing treatments, and to the erosion of the community support systems that actually prevent people that are taking drugs from escalating and that sustain their recovery.”

Biden’s Overdose Prevention Plan Faces Social, State Barriers, Experts Say.

[Bloomberg Law](#) (11/17, Lopez, Subscription Publication, 4K) reports, “The Biden administration’s sweeping plan to quell rising drug deaths in the U.S. could face roadblocks as treatment specialists grapple with limitations in tracking overdoses and varying state regulations.” The four tenets of President Biden’s government-wide addiction fighting strategy are “harm reduction, recovery support, evidence-based treatment, and primary prevention.” However, “tackling a hodgepodge of state policies, diverging treatment approaches, and funding restraints will be key to getting the administration’s efforts off the ground, health policy experts say.” HHS “announced the overdose prevention strategy just one day before the Senate confirmed Rahul Gupta as the new director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.”

Most Physicians Say Telemedicine Visits Limit Ability To Determine If Patients Are Misusing Prescription Drugs, Study Suggests.

[Modern Healthcare](#) (11/16, Devereaux, Subscription Publication, 215K) reports “three-fourths of physicians said they believe telemedicine visits limit their ability to determine whether patients are at risk for or are currently misusing prescription drugs, according to a new study.” Providers are worried “that substance abuse issues are slipping through the cracks in virtual care, as patients experience more stress and mental illness, according to the 2021 Quest Diagnostics Health Trends report released in November.”

Project Equity: FDA Considers Options To Increase Diverse Enrollment In Clinical Trials.

[Cancer Letter](#) (11/12) reported “clinical trialists in oncology may want to pay close attention to the” FDA’s “latest plans to increase representation of traditionally marginalized populations in drug development.” The FDA is “crafting a guidance that would define what constitutes a ‘health disparity’ and how FDA would interpret ‘adequate representation’ of ethnic and racial minorities in clinical trials, sources said.” Lola Fashoyin-Aje, deputy division director in FDA’s Office of Oncologic Diseases, “is the program lead for OCE’s [Oncology Center of Excellence] new Project Equity, which works to ‘improve access to clinical trials of oncology medical products for populations that have historically been underrepresented in clinical research.’” NCI’s National Clinical Trials Network group chairs “say there is momentum across the board to reduce the disparity in access to novel therapeutics

and clinical trials.” OHSU Knight Cancer Institute professor Charles Blanke, OCE Director Richard Pazdur, and OCE chief of medical oncology Julia Beaver were mentioned.

Telehealth Effort To Treat Bipolar Disorder, PTSD In Rural Areas Results In 32% Improvement On Scale Of Mental Health Functioning, Researchers Say.

According to [STAT](#) (11/17, Aguilar, 262K), a four-year “effort to pipe big-city mental health” clinicians “to rural communities over video...reached people who wouldn’t otherwise have access to mental health care; it tackled difficult diagnoses that don’t have simple answers; and it stretched how many people the most skilled providers can treat.” The approximately 1,000-patient study “sought to deliver treatment to rural patients with post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder,” connecting “psychiatrists and psychologists to primary care clinics within federally qualified health centers in three states that didn’t have any on staff.” The study revealed that “patients showed a 32% improvement on a scale of mental health functioning.” The question now becomes whether such an effort can be scaled upward across the US. The [findings](#) were published online Aug. 25 in JAMA Psychiatry. [\[Article attached.\]](#)

Medical Innovation ‘Cures 2.0’ Bill Unveiled In U.S. House.

[Bloomberg Government](#) (11/16, Ruoff, Baumann) reports Reps. Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Fred Upton (R-MI) “announced their long-awaited bill to speed up medical innovations and create a new federal research agency Tuesday.” The lawmakers “said their legislation would transform how Medicare pays for new treatments and technologies – potentially bringing them to seniors faster – and increase access to telehealth services.” The legislation “also would authorize a new biomedical research agency designed to catalyze cutting-edge discoveries that’s modeled off existing programs at the departments of Defense and Energy.” The two lawmakers “underscored that the Cures 2.0 version really reflects the vision laid out by the White House, such as locating ARPA-H [Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health] within the National Institutes of Health.”

Additional Sources. The [Detroit News](#) (11/16, Nann Burke, 1.16M) reports “the bill, designed as a sequel to the 21st Century Cures Act, is dubbed Cures 2.0.” Upton “and DeGette told reporters Tuesday that they hope to ‘fast track’ the bill to pass it in early 2022 at the latest, saying it’s critical for accelerating the delivery of medical innovations and treatment to patients that need it.” The bill “would authorize \$6.5 billion to create and fund the first three years of” ARPA-H. The bill “would also require” HHS “to conduct a national study of the implications of ‘long’ COVID-19, as well as a study on long COVID in children.”

[Fierce Healthcare](#) (11/16, King, 150K) reports the “legislation would require Medicare to cover breakthrough medical devices faster and make permanent key flexibilities to telehealth reimbursement for providers.” The bill “would permanently remove Medicare’s geographic and originating site requirements that require a patient to live in a rural area and be in a doctor’s office to qualify for

telehealth services.” The legislation would also “allow CMS to temporarily cover breakthrough products approved by FDA for four years.”

U.S. Government Will Fund First Therapeutic Psilocybin Research in 50 Years.

[Dope Magazine](#) (11/15, Williams) reports that “for the first time in 50 years, the U.S. federal government granted researchers funding to study the therapeutic potential of psilocybin.” NIH gave “Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with University of Alabama at Birmingham and New York University, \$4 million to research psilocybin...and whether it can help people to quit smoking.” The new “study is identifying treatment to help people quit smoking, so it was eligible for funding by the NIDA.” NIH Director Francis Collins “said in a Senate budget hearing in May that NIH and the agencies under it will need to take a hard look at the promise of psychedelic compounds in regard to mental health.”

Additional Source. [PhuketTimes](#) (11/15) reports that Collins said, “I think as we’ve learned more about how the brain works, we began to realize that these are potential tools for research purposes and might be clinically beneficial.”

DEA Boosts Psilocybin, MDMA And DMT Production Levels Again In Final Quotas For 2021.

[Marijuana Moment](#) (11/12, Jaeger) reported that the Drug Enforcement Administration “is again greatly increasing legal production quotas for illegal Schedule I drugs like psilocybin, MDMA and DMT.” For 2021, the DEA “now says in a notice set to be published in the Federal Register on Monday that it wants 6,000 grams of psilocybin manufactured by the end of the year, which is quadruple the figure it last put forward.” According to the article, “National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Director Nora Volkow told Marijuana Moment in a recent interview that she was encouraged by DEA’s previous proposed increase in drug production quota.”

ARPA-H, The Key Element Of Biden Cancer Agenda, Faces Uncertain Future.

[Cancer Letter](#) (11/12) reported “President Biden has been describing the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H), a DARPA-like biomedical research agency, as the centerpiece of his effort to ‘end cancer as we know it.’” However, “the proposed NIH agency that would enable the rapid development of high-risk, high-reward projects is itself at high risk of not being authorized and funded.” On “July 12, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health, & Human Services voted to appropriate \$3 billion for ARPA-H and an increase of \$3.5 billion for the rest of NIH.” This increase “falls short of President Biden’s request of \$6.5 billion over three years for ARPA-H, but provides a greater budget increase than requested by the president for NIH institutes and centers.”

Pennsylvania Reportedly Could Become Leader In Studying Psilocybin As Treatment For Mental Illness Under Proposed Legislation.

The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) (11/15, Brubaker) reports, “Pennsylvania could become a leader in studying magic mushrooms as a treatment for mental illness under a bill that was introduced last month in the House of Representatives and is scheduled for a Health Committee vote Tuesday in Harrisburg.” The proposed legislation “would establish a framework for clinical studies of psilocybin, the active ingredient in magic mushrooms” and “give researchers some cover for sidestepping cumbersome federal regulations that still categorize the substance as having no accepted medical use despite growing evidence that it does.”

Biden Nominates Robert Califf, Former Obama FDA Chief, As Agency Commissioner.

The [Washington Post](#) (11/12, McGinley, 10.52M) reported “President Biden on Friday nominated former Food and Drug Administration commissioner Robert M. Califf to return as the agency’s head, ending a difficult, months-long search to find a leader for the sprawling bureaucracy on the pandemic’s front lines.” The President said Califf “has the experience and expertise to lead the Food and Drug Administration during a critical time in our nation’s fight to put an end to the coronavirus pandemic.” Califf, “a renowned cardiologist and researcher, is senior adviser for Verily, a research organization devoted to the life sciences, and Google Health.” Califf was “FDA commissioner during the last year of the Obama administration.” Janet Woodcock, “former head of the agency’s powerful Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, has been acting commissioner since January and initially was a top contender for the nomination.”

Additional Sources. The [New York Times](#) (11/12, Stolberg, Kaplan, 20.6M) reported “White House officials might have concluded that they could not find a suitable candidate with no industry ties.” Califf “has long been a consultant to drug companies and ran a research center at Duke University that received some funding from the drug industry.” Ever “since Margaret Hamburg, who served as commissioner for most of the Obama administration, left in 2015, the F.D.A. has had seven different commissioners – some acting, some permanent – including Dr. Califf, who served for just 11 months after Dr. Hamburg’s departure.”

South Dakota Governor ‘Absolutely’ Credits Lack Of Lockdowns With Overdose Death Decline.

[Newsweek](#) (11/17, Fink, 2.67M) reports, “At a time when the United States saw a record-high number of overdose deaths, South Dakota saw the largest decline, something Governor Kristi Noem attributes to her decision to keep the state open during the pandemic.” According to Newsweek, “Experts raised concerns early during the pandemic about the potential for lockdowns to have a negative impact on people’s mental and physical health,” drawing attention “to increases in drug and alcohol use, and in the first year of the pandemic, drug overdose deaths

nationwide increased by almost 30 percent, topping 100,000 for the first time.”
Meanwhile, National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Dr. Nora Volkow “told The New York Times that people who struggle with addiction and those in recovery are prone to relapse.”

Funding Opportunities



[RFA-DA-22-036](#)

[NIH HEAL Initiative: Preventing Opioid Misuse and Co-Occurring Conditions by Intervening on Social Determinants \(R01 Clinical Trials Optional\)](#)

[NOT-DA-21-060](#)

[Notice of Special Interest \(NOSI\): Reducing Stigma Related to Drug Use in Human Service Settings](#)

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