



Statement by Richard Pops, Chairman and CEO of Alkermes on the Annual CDC Report on Drug Overdose Deaths and Suicide Mortality in the United States

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The most recent CDC reports provide a devastating reflection of the inadequacy of our nation's approach to addiction and mental illness and a cold, quantitative assessment of the human toll it is having on our country.

70,237 people lost to overdose in 2017.

More than 47,000 suicides – the highest rate in over 50 years.

Current strategies for addressing these problems and infrastructure to implement them are clearly insufficient. Individuals and their loved ones struggling with addiction and mental illness often have no place to go. They fall through gaping holes in our communities' safety nets, and we are just not doing enough about it.

And there are indeed things that can be done. Initiatives based on proven models with measurable outcomes ready to be deployed.

An example: There are federal guidelines mandating the use of evidence-based treatments with proven effectiveness in combating opioid use disorder and preventing relapse. Despite this, and even with the availability of increased government funding, fewer than 5 percent of patients are presented with a choice of all three FDA-approved medications included in the guidelines.

5 percent. One in twenty patients.

Why does that make any sense? Tens of thousands of people are dying. Would this be the case if the same individuals were suffering from cancer or an infectious disease?

We owe it to patients, their families and their communities to address this vast inequity. Another year with another rise in overdose and suicide deaths should compel us toward a rigorous examination of a broken addiction treatment system that does not support the adoption and utilization of evidence-based treatment options.

In our history as a nation, we have turned the tide of some of the most devastating global public health epidemics. We have done so by being honest about the challenges and barriers to treatment and by coming together to work to address them and systematically eliminate them.

The CDC's numbers compel us to acknowledge the truth: we have inadequate treatment systems for addiction and serious mental illness. It is time for change.